

WANTED A TORTOISESHELL

PETER
BLUNDELL





Digitized by the Internet Archive
in 2007 with funding from
Microsoft Corporation

WANTED A TORTOISE-SHELL

BY THE SAME AUTHOR

THE FINGER OF MR. BLEE

OH, MR. BIDGOOD

LOVE-BIRDS IN THE COCO-
NUTS

THE BODLEY HEAD

WANTED
A TORTOISE-SHELL
BY PETER BLUNDELL



LONDON : JOHN LANE, THE BODLEY HEAD
NEW YORK : JOHN LANE COMPANY. MCMXVII

PRINTED BY WILLIAM CLOWES AND SONS, LIMITED
LONDON AND BECCLES, ENGLAND

PR
6003
B619w

TO
D. B.



WANTED A TORTOISE-SHELL

WANTED A TORTOISE-SHELL

CHAPTER I

ABOUT six o'clock one morning the small steamer *Sherrybung* was rounding Pisang point for the purpose of entering the Bay of Jallagar. Night mists still held the rigid mangrove swamps that lined the shore, and lay in thin wreaths about the green-spangled coast mountains. But, although the day was young, the sun, well above in the sky, was already engaged on its daily occupation of trying to boil the ocean. And aboard the steamer, in spite of protecting awnings and other paraphernalia with which civilized man surrounds himself in the tropics, the air was hot.

For ships' crews, however, heat holds but few terrors. Sailors do not care much about washing either decks or necks in the Arctic ; and

British mates seek out the lotus-eating life of the Indian Ocean, weakening though it be to constitution and morals, and eschew always if possible the brisker atmosphere and more billowy waves of the North Atlantic.

The crew of the *Sherrybung*, Malays to a man, and her mate, Mr. Jones, formed no exception to the common rule. But her solitary passenger was in a different case. He felt the heat. It was for this reason he had forsaken his bunk at the break of day, clad in grass slippers, small bath-towel, eyeglasses and solar topee, in search of a sea-breeze. Having searched the whole ship without any result, he was now seated on a bollard near the fore-castle hatch reading Marcus Aurelius, a work from the perusal of which he usually obtained good counsel, but which he now found contained no instructions whatever concerning the doing without of sea-breezes.

If it were a certainty that the books people parade with on the decks of steamers are the ones they are fondest of, the world would have at hand another means of character-reading. But, unfortunately, there are such things as French novels hidden away in bunkhead bookshelves.

Nevertheless a chastely bound Marcus Aurelius, combined with a volume on political economy, does point at certain tastes. A man who reads such books on steamers' decks should turn out to be a person of some pretensions intellectually, argumentative perhaps, but quiet to ride or drive domestically.

Such a description fitted well with the eye-glasses and the features of the passenger. The bath-towel? He was a bachelor, and the ship carried not a single lady that trip.

He was, in fact, one of that large army of fledgling professors that America scatters by the handful over the Old World nowadays, to amass knowledge for the benefit of her coming generation of citizens. His name, Haliburton J. Bliss.

With him as figurehead, the *Sherrybung* rounded the point and discovered herself to the island of Jallagar, as she was in the habit of doing about this time on the first and third Thursdays of every month. The unrucked sea became lighter and more opaque, the sapphire of the ocean changing to the turquoise of the bay.

The steamer's velvet-throated whistle sounded

"good morning" several times. When in his opinion this duty had been efficiently performed, the mate released the string operating the steam-whistle valve, left the bridge in charge of the captain, and strolled forward to inspect the gear on the forecastle head. In so doing he followed the custom of all ships' mates on entering port. He did not, however, strain this custom as he might have done and order all passengers off the deck, but instead lounged over to the solitary specimen on the bollard and, affably for him, drew attention to the view.

"Yes, it looks a nice island," agreed Professor Bliss. "Beautifully flat, green, and peaceful. Seems," he added, "as though it hadn't shaved for three days."

"What look like whiskers are really palm-trees," explained Mr. Jones. "It's a great coconut place. What with copra and cats—— Are you staying long there, mister?"

He gazed at the other inquisitively. Americans, most of them, went on direct to Manila. But this one had booked as far as Jallagar only. To imagine what any sane person, not British, should want on an island stigmatized unanimously

by the whole sea-faring profession as "God-forsaken" was difficult, but the annoying reticence of the solitary passenger had so far left the officers of the *Sherrybung* with no other alternative.

"Are you staying long there?" demanded Mr. Jones, determined to learn something before the ship got into port.

"I may be there a year or two," replied Professor Bliss.

"Good Lord!" ejaculated the mate. "But perhaps you'll get used to it," he added comfortingly. "Got a job there?"

"Yes. I've been sent here to learn something about how you Britishers govern your small colonies."

"Ho, ho!" muttered the mate, looking at him reflectively. "Then I suppose you'll be in the Government Service?"

"I suppose I shall," admitted the professor. "Is there anything the matter with it?"

"Oh no."

"Then what are you shaking your head for?"

"When I say there's nothing the matter with it," explained Mr. Jones in a melancholy voice,

6 WANTED A TORTOISE-SHELL

"I don't mean I should like to be in your shoes. I should not : especially if you've got much to do with the Resident."

"What's wrong with the Resident?" demanded the professor with much interest.

"Well, my private opinion, between you and me, is that he's a bit wrong in the head," replied Mr. Jones confidentially, eyeing the other's astonished face with an expression of some pleasure. "He's different from other Residents."

"That's no reason for thinking he's mad," pointed out Professor Bliss.

"Doesn't take much notice of Jallagar," went on the mate. "But is very busy about Egypt. Likes the Pyramids, the Egyptian temples, and rot of that sort. At least I think it's rot. He's got dotty on cats. Treats them as sacred. Has a Swedish loafer named Kamp up from Pelung to look after them. This fellow has played the devil with the whole island. He has got the Resident completely under his thumb, and has now been made Postmaster-General. Some say," continued the mate in a whisper, "that he's after the Resident's daughter. If it

is so it's a damned shame, for she's a nice girl. I don't know what her father's doing. He must be mad. They say he spends every cent of his salary on things from Cairo. We brought up from Pelung for him last voyage a couple of Nile crocodiles, and any quantity of small stuff such as carved bricks, bits of statues, idols, manuscripts and curios found in tombs. We've got a mummy on board for him this trip. I don't mean you, of course," he added, with a coarse laugh as he lounged off.

The professor, looking as if he would have liked some further information about this remarkable Resident, picked up the book on political economy, sat down on the bollard and became at once absorbed. He remained so until a gang of brown-skinned sailors uncoiled a yellow and much patched leather hose and began to wash the decks.

Then, hearing the hissing of the water, he laid down the volume, arose, and turning towards the man with the nozzle smiled and nodded.

"*Tuan mau mandi! Baik la!*" the man yelled back, obviously amused that any one should want to wash in such a manner.

The professor sprang up lightly from the bollard, laid down the volume, kicked aside topee, pince-nez, and slippers, threw aside the bath-towel, revealing a pair of red bathing drawers, and sprang towards the hose.

He revolved slowly and with dignity as the glittering, sunlit stream of water played about him.

After all, the naked body is the real index of character. A strong man does not, for instance, stand like an old cab-horse. Neither did Halliburton J. Bliss. His lily-white legs were straight and graceful. His lily-white body was square set. It faced the splashing water defiantly. And the legs, the body, the arms were of good useful dimensions, and bore a fair proportion one to the other.

Thus far praise, the rest, alas, is blame.

The velvet-throated whistle shouted again, and at the sound a wizened, elderly, little man in a kimono, who was seated at a richly inlaid table on the veranda of the largest house in Jallagar, jumped up and, seizing a telescope from the rack on the wall, levelled it at the *Sherrybung*, now some two miles away.

A girl, also in a kimono, laid down the book she was reading and, sitting rather upright in her cane chair, waited, obviously for the man to speak.

"Do you see anything, father?" she asked at last.

"There's somebody in white on the bridge," replied the man.

"That will be the captain," I expect."

"And—and—I'm not sure, but there's something white in the front of the ship. It looks like a man."

"That will be our visitor—none of the officers would be on the forecastle head with the ship so far off land."

"It is certainly not one of the officers," said the man. "It is a stranger to the tropics, judging from the skimpy cut of his suit. A few of the crew are up there with him. They are busy about something, but the boat is too far off to see what."

"It must be our visitor," the girl decided. "Americans often dress differently from us in the tropics. Well, I'm glad he's here—I shall go and bathe now," she added, leaving the veranda.

She walked along shaded corridors hung with Egyptian tapestry of grotesque design. Sunshine filtering through the lattices shimmered on polished floors. Warm light of the tropical morning threw shadows before her as with light step she passed. At the bathroom a Malay woman servant, clad in a silk *sarong* and short linen coat, handed her towels. She entered, and the servant, shutting the door, stood before it like a sentinel.

But little light filtered into the bathroom. The patterns of the tiled floor and white enamelled walls could barely be distinguished. The vaulted roof was scarcely visible. The place, so cool, so quiet, so robbed of all the warmth of the sun, had an atmosphere almost cloistral.

A huge round porcelain bath of antique design stood in the middle of the floor. Near it was a bench of carved camphor wood, and on this the girl, unrobing, laid her clothes.

Her bare, round arms gleamed like ivory in the twilight as she unfastened and coiled again her jet-black hair. She moved with athletic grace and with the lightness of the perfectly trained.

How different Professor Haliburton J. Bliss ! His movements under the hose are of the nature of a shuffle. His modelling does not bear examination. He is lumpy in the wrong places, his stomach too prominent, there are pads of flesh about his shoulder-blades, he has the beginnings of a double chin. Evidently he is a man who had not played.

His hair appears to be his only well-trained feature. The very hose seems incapable of effacing its complacent parting. But his body resembles clay rather than marble ; his hands, though well cared for, are small and helpless-looking ; his misty blue eyes honest but unintelligent and commonplace.

A gong sounded. He at once went to his cabin and proceeded to dress. The steamer drew nearer to shore. The anatomy of the island became visible.

There is, except for its hill, little to distinguish Jallagar from other islands similarly situated. Nature, cold and devilish at the poles, on the equator becomes a smiling sorceress. Give her a sand-heap, some coral and salt water, and she will out of these produce a multitude of coco-nut

palms. She has done this in Jallagar better, so the inhabitants say, than elsewhere.

The groves form a thick fringe all round the island, and the town of Jallagar itself is built on the withered remains of the first of them. Everywhere among the houses bald-headed palms rear themselves towards the glaring blue sky, stark and senile, and with not a nut among them.

Around the conical bases of these brown ancients play the great-grandchildren of the men who planted them, little copper-coloured children dressed in amulets and not much else, shouting, kicking, hacking the pearl-grey trunks with rusty knives, and making mud-pies of the black sandy soil. And on every open space the dazzling white kernel of the coco-nut—the copra—spread on grass mats, is drying in the sun.

Professor Bliss was shaving in his cabin, with the bath-towel about him, when the steamer drew round into the small bay on which the town and harbour lie. The channel runs close inshore here, and the steamer brushed the trees. A large fronded leaf came in suddenly through the cabin port-hole and tickled him as he shaved.

"Palm-trees," muttered the professor. "I must go on deck."

He scraped away with the safety razor and sponged himself. Then, springing round, he bent over the lower bunk and unfolded from a pile of clean clothes lying there an immaculate white duck suit. Yesterday's soiled suit was hanging from a peg. With inexperienced hands he proceeded to undo the metal-fastened silver buttons and transfer them to the clean jacket. Having done so to his great satisfaction, he put on the jacket and found that all the buttons faced inwards. The discovery brought on a profuse perspiration. He set the fan going and started to rectify the error.

Drops from his brow and arms spotted the starched white surface of the coat. The fasteners clung to the buttons and developed a peculiar slipperiness. He seized the old jacket, mopped his brow and fingers on it, and returned to and finished the task. Before putting the jacket on the safety razor had to be cleaned. He dragged the greasy, yellow-enamelled toilet-pail from under the cabin washstand and, placing it in the middle of the cabin floor, held the razor firmly over it

with one hand and with the other hand manipulated the cabin water-bottle.

In the middle of this delicate operation he heard the telegraph ring sharply. He felt the ship quiver. Then the engines, put astern, revolved with all the uneven clatter of a person running backwards.

"We're ashore!" exclaimed the professor, and clambering as best he could on top of the washstand, he put his head out of the port-hole.

Now for the first time he looked at miles of coco-nut palms. Weathered grey trunks, regiment after regiment, stood at attention as the ship glided on again. Fretted leaves, of all colours from vandyke brown to olive green, waved a salute. Dotted here and there in the shade of the palms were native huts, built of reeds, paraffin-tins, old packing-cases. On the narrow ribbon of sun-bleached sandy foreshore, against which surged the light-blue water of the steamer wake, were fishing traps and nets and unpainted grey dug-outs. Women sat on the frail verandas of the huts, women wrapped in many-coloured cotton robes, who hid their faces as the steamer drew close. Sun-blackened fishermen,

dressed in blue dungaree with bright red scanty turbans, mended nets on the beach. There was present in force the ubiquitous small boy.

To one of these latter who stood, nearly naked, close to the water, looking it seemed awestruck, as well he might, at the wonderful white man's steamer and its mysterious passenger who had come from the great land across the sea, the professor shouted a smiling "Good morning."

The boy stared, put his hand into his scanty waistcloth, and, withdrawing it, threw a weapon. The weapon caught Haliburton J. full in the eye.

"Dash it! I'm poisoned!" he spluttered. Leaping backwards he landed neatly in the toilet-pail. And at once a mixture of professor, pail, water, and clean white jacket rolled on the floor.

Haliburton J., extricating himself with great speed, dashed out of the cabin and down the alleyway holding his eye. Whatever had struck him contained, it was plain, some very powerful native poison. The smell of it nearly overpowered him. An immediate antidote was clearly absolutely necessary if the eye was to be saved. That is, of course, if there was any eye left. He was beginning to have doubts.

At such times as these people think quickly. Haliburton J. had already travelled in thought as far as a hospital, when he found himself colliding with something soft and yet not too soft.

"Why don't you look where you're going?" growled Mr. Jones.

"I've been poisoned!" gasped Haliburton J. in excuse. He related in one breath how the poisoning took place, and demanded an antidote.

"An antidote for what?" asked Mr. Jones.

"How should I know?" gasped Haliburton J. indignantly. "I'm a stranger here. If I'd been in the place as long as you, I should recognize the frightful stuff by its beastly odour!"

The mate bent over and sniffed.

"Smells like rotten egg," he said shortly. "And that's what it is too. Here's a bit of shell sticking to your undervest. A wash is what you want."

On returning to the cabin to finish dressing the professor found that one of his books had floated away under the bunk on the top of the tide of slop-water. On dragging it out, a letter

fell from it. He picked them both up together and, drying the book absent-mindedly on the soiled white jacket, glanced through the letter. It was one he had received from an aunt in New York, and in the hurry of departure had put away with scarcely a glance. Turning over the page, he found a postscript, of the existence of which he had been entirely unaware :

“P.S.—Just as I was closing up this letter I had a line from your Aunt Phœbe in Scotland. She says one of your Scotch uncles, Alexis Campbell, is out in Jallagar, and is one of the biggest merchants on the island, and that she is writing to him telling him you are going there. Please be sure to seek him out at once on your arrival !”

“It’s a good thing that letter dropped out,” said Haliburton J. to himself.

He eyed the book, and perceived that it had bestowed a liberal share of the dye from its red cover on the soiled white jacket.

Throwing both into a corner, he proceeded in some disgust to complete his toilet. When at last he reached the deck the *Sherrybung* was moored safely alongside Jallagar wharf.

CHAPTER II

THE *Sherrybung* had been tied up alongside a decrepit wooden wharf, understood to be the oldest wooden wharf in Jallagar, and therefore sufficiently respectable to be the property of that venerable steamship company, the Bung Line.

Haliburton J., coming out on deck observed this wharf through eager eyeglasses. It looked withered, worm-eaten, and fit for burial, so the political economist within him whispered ; but Romance pointed to the beautiful grey colouring of the sun-bleached sheds and timbered deck, to the rich browns of the sea-stained piles, to the green hair seaweed astretch in the limpid water below, where shoals of tiny parrot fish were playing.

At the back was a road lined with one-story, red-painted shops, the open fronts of which were

full of merchandise. Near these, in the shadow, folk were passing and repassing. But the sun-baked wharf was empty.

Aboard all was strangely quiet. The crew were at breakfast, if the evidence of the galley chimney was to be trusted. Except for Mr. Jones, who was on his beloved forecastle head inspecting the condition of the ship's mooring lines, there was nobody in sight. Presently he too moved out of the picture.

"How's the poisoned eye?" he asked, coming down the steps and smiling rudely.

"Much better," answered Haliburton J., with a forced laugh.

"Coming down to have some tommy?" inquired the mate.

"Presently, when the bell rings," said Haliburton J.

"We don't ring it in port," the mate informed him, and passed on.

A smell of eggs and bacon came through the open port-holes of the saloon. The captain, a short, red-faced man with an appearance of being about to burst out of his white suit, came to a doorway, said "Good morning" in a voice that

brooked no contradiction, and asked a similar question about breakfast.

"Almost immediately," said Haliburton J. And, turning, he gazed ashore once more.

He had received a letter from the Resident of Jallagar at Pelung, and gathered from its contents that he might expect to be met on arrival. There was as yet, however, no sign of that expectation being fulfilled.

"They don't seem to work to a time-table out here," he murmured. "They eat and sleep, I suppose, and just do things in between."

A big, yellow pariah dog crawled out of a heap of timber that lay untidily stacked in a corner ; and with great deliberation came and squatted on the wharf opposite Haliburton and examined him closely.

Haliburton J. returned the compliment.

"He's got mange. I wonder they allow it," he muttered. "An ugly, dangerous brute !"

The dog on his part did not seem to think much of Haliburton J., for after sniffing the air for a while, and finding apparently an evil odour, it raised its head and howled dismally.

Haliburton J. stooped, made a pretence of

picking up something and throwing it. With another doleful howl the dog retired to the shelter of the timber. It had the air of a dog who would appear again if sufficient inducement offered.

A minute later the sound of wheels withdrew the professor's mind from the consideration of how one might reform the Jallagar Dog Licensing Regulations to the realm of actuality.

Adjusting his eyeglasses, he perceived a dog-cart coming rapidly along the road. This was the first home-like thing he had seen on the island, and he followed its course interestedly.

It passed out of sight behind a row of rusty corrugated-sheet coaling sheds, then came again into view. The turn-out was spick and span, the horse a bright bay, and the occupants consisted of a lady dressed in white, and a red-turbaned, red-uniformed Malay syce.

On arriving opposite the ship, the cart turned smartly and headed towards the wharf. Drawing up with skill, the lady handed the reins to the syce and prepared to descend. As she did so a small yellow cat appeared suddenly from somewhere in the trap and, springing to the ground, ran rapidly across the wharf.

"Snicketty ! Snicketty !" cried the lady in a high clear voice.

But the cat paid no heed. It was out to run, and it ran. In entire ignorance of the fact that, lurking at hand, there was a dog with nothing particular to do that morning, it chose a line of country that traversed the piled-up timber.

The yellow dog appeared to view, running hard and barking furiously.

"Oh, my poor Snicketty !" cried the young lady. And she also began to run.

They came towards the steamer. Of the three the dog was by far the fleetest.

"Oh, my *poor* Snicketty !" cried the lady despairingly.

It occurred to Haliburton J. suddenly that from every point of view he would be doing good work if he saved that cat. Not that he was fond of cats, but he hated that dog anyhow, and——

Within a foot of him was the gangway, from which a white, many-stepped and much berailed accommodation ladder formed a bridge to the wharf. With an agility that surprised himself he took off his eyeglasses, mounted the

gangway, and bounded down this accommodation ladder.

Now, accommodation ladders are meant to be used with dignity. If bounded down they achieve a resilience akin to that of diving boards. The bound that took Professor Bliss finally on to the wharf was an affair almost of furlongs. He reached his destination at the foot of the ladder just as the yellow dog in hot pursuit of the cat arrived at the same spot. There was a howl from the dog, a muttered exclamation from the man, and the pursuit continued, first the cat, then the dog, then the lady, and then, when he had picked himself up, Haliburton J.

But the latter by means of his well-timed fall had robbed the dog of half its speed. It now had the use of three legs only, the fourth having been thoroughly well trodden on. But it was a game dog.

The young lady's skirts placed her at a disadvantage, although she was running excellently. Haliburton J., at scratch, had the field well in hand.

In sixty seconds he was running down the road level with the dog, in seventy with a well-aimed

kick he had disabled the dog's other leg, and in seventy-seven and a half he had swooped down and picked up safe and unhurt the yellow cat. It was a little furry ball, composed mainly of claws and palpitation.

"Poor pussy!" said Haliburton J., stroking it and looking down the road to where the young lady was walking rapidly towards him. "Poor pussy! quiet then. Go away, you beast!"

This to the yellow dog who had limped up barking joyously because, although he had not got the cat, one of his fellow pursuers had.

"Go away, you beast!" cried Haliburton J. He raised a foot threateningly. The dog, probably driven to madness by such an exhibition of treachery and base selfishness, rushed in and, seizing him by the trousers, tore them. It then went away howling more loudly than ever.

"You've got him!" cried the young lady, coming up. "Oh, give him to me. What claws! Thank you so much."

"It's a very great pleasure," said Professor Bliss, bowing.

"Chasing kittens on a hot morning? Not

much pleasure that, do you think?" asked the young lady.

"No," said Haliburton J., bowing again. "I didn't mean quite that." He wanted to add, "Finding something in this island quite up to anything we have in America," but luckily did not.

"Professor Bliss, I think?" asked the girl. "Yes? I was certain you were directly I saw you."

"Indeed! How did you know?"

"When I first saw you, you were jumping. It was magnificent."

"I don't think the dog thinks so," said Haliburton J. modestly.

"It was splendid of you," went on the young lady. "But as you jumped the wind blew up your coat. I said at once to myself, 'This must be an American.' You've a belt round your waist with a big revolver and a knife in it."

"I should think I had, coming into a place like this," said the professor, laughing. "The natives here seem out of hand. Only this morning, as I was looking out of my cabin window—I mean port-hole—a youngster little bigger than

an infant threw a rotten egg at me and nearly blew my eye out. It may be a quiet place. They say so in the guide-books. But I'm taking no risks."

"And now that dog has torn your tr——"

"Don't mention it," said the professor, hastily.

"You *have* been in the wars," went on the girl, laughing. "I think the best plan would be for you to get into the dog-cart, and I will drive you straight home. Don't bother about your things. The servant will get them from the steamer, or we'll send our bullock-cart for them."

"But——" said Haliburton J., staring at her.

"But what?"

"I'm sorry," said Haliburton J., uncomfortably, "to have to refuse your offer of hospitality. But—I'm going to stay at the Resident's house. I'm expecting the old gentleman down here any minute."

The girl flushed slightly, then laughed.

"I ought to have told you," she said with quiet dignity. "The Resident is my father, and I live at the Residency. I am Miss Vannery."

"I am pleased," said Haliburton J.

They walked slowly along to where the dog-cart was standing. He felt for his eyeglasses,

found them undamaged, and putting them on stole a look at her, hoping not to find defects. Glasses are terrible disillusioners, but in this instance they improved the view.

She was tall and very dark. The chase had made her hair untidy. One black, rather curly lock had escaped from the confinement of her severe white topee. Her blue eyes sparkled and her pale cheeks were faintly flushed. Her white drill frock was cut to perfection.

Beside her, Haliburton J. felt like a broken-winded navy. It was a feeling he did not often experience—no professors do. But even broken-winded navvies have eyes ; and, after all, glances are about the only things the law allows to be stolen with impunity. Haliburton J., wiping his glasses, ventured to steal another glance. The girl, conscious of being inspected, looked ahead of her, smiling carelessly.

After a few seconds' theft, Haliburton J.'s eyes again sought the ground. He walked humbly, conscious of a slight, not-to-be-explained excitement, and feeling more navy-like than ever.

"How sharp the cat's claws are !" murmured

the young lady. "Did you have a good voyage up? My father is looking forward to seeing you."

They reached the dog-cart. The syce had drawn it a little to one side to allow room for a hand-barrow to be pushed on to the wharf. Two ebony-coloured Klings, dressed in red with yellow facings, were pushing the barrow. There was with them a nondescript creature who might have been a very white half-caste or, on the other hand, a European. He had a red, seamed, bloated face, was unshaven, and wore a huge carrotty moustache. His uncleaned canvas shoes were in holes.

His khaki suit was threadbare, dirty, and tattered. Through its open, ragged collar showed inches of red, flabby neck. And surmounting all was a thing of pith which had once been a helmet, but which rain and wear had reduced to a condition of almost immoral shapelessness.

"They are going to fetch the mail from the ship and take it to the Post Office," explained Miss Vannery. And then in a whisper, "Isn't it terrible? Did you see him?"

"Who?" asked the professor.

“Why, that man with them,” said the girl, in a low voice. “He looked like a European.”

“Would he be what we call in the States a poor white?” asked Haliburton J.

CHAPTER III

THE gentleman with the broken-brimmed topee—his name was Alexis McQuat—kept his eyes on the ground as the Resident's daughter and the stranger passed.

His quick ears caught the girl's remark, and he went a fiery red. For long enough he had observed Miss Vannery as she drove about the narrow, dusty streets of the town. He had watched her often walking briskly through the sunlight, watched her entering the native shops. She was one of the few things in the town worth a gaze.

Once from the hot darkness of a native bar-room—nowadays he was never to be seen in the European hotel—he had witnessed a pair of laden Chinese coolies, coming along through the sun glare in a cloud of dust, their queues rolled up, their half-naked bodies glistening, almost collide with her as they trotted by. She nearly fell in

avoiding them, and he, starting forward to render her aid, had suddenly remembered that the Eurasian next to him was by no means the sort of man to be left in charge of some one else's half-finished glass of ale.

It was galling to a man who still had some spirit left in him to think that after such a chance of distinguishing himself he had at last come under her observation when a temporary stress of circumstances had forced him to take a position as pusher of the Government mail barrow, and merely assistant pusher at that.

"The pay's not dirty, anyhow," he muttered, trying to console himself.

"She has a fine figure, has that missie, and is always in the company of men. Pleasant it would be to have half a dozen wives such as she," remarked the sooty-faced Kling in charge of the barrow, smirking.

"Shut your heid, ye blether!" burst out McQuat angrily, in broad Scotch.

The Kling, surprised and alarmed, moved away.

"Conceited, drunken——" McQuat heard him muttering continually.

"Shut your heid, I tell ye! *Diam!* Ye *babi!*"

"I'll speak to Tuan Kamp about you," announced the Kling spitefully.

"Kiss your aunt, ye black-faced monkey!"

They waited round the barrow in silence. The groves of coco-nut palms across the glowing blue strip of water that formed the harbour were already drooping in the fierce sunlight. Coolies talking noisily had gathered about the steamer. A winch or two had begun to rattle.

Intense heat Alexis had endured for years without noticing it. But to find himself blushing on the equator when his blushing machinery had not been working for ten years was oddly irritating.

"It'll be all the same a hundred years afterwards," he muttered gruffly. "Who is she, I'd like to know? No better nor any one else. Maybe wurrse! Claes are not everything."

The incident reminded him of bygone days when putting on a clean white suit was for him a daily occurrence, when shaving was a habit, not an event.

It was more years than he cared to think

about since he, full of ambition and a strict teetotaller, left Scotland for the glittering East. Underneath the crown of that broken-brimmed topee was a bald patch. He wore his red moustache carefully curled, his figure slightly bow-windowed. These, and his red nose, were the only possessions of his that had showed increase since his departure from home.

He had, in short, managed at forty-five to become so altered that his parents would not have known him, and his friends did not want to do so. Some such thought as this struck him as he pushed along the barrow.

"Well, it will be all the same a hundred years afterwards," he muttered again.

But incantation could not break the spell on him that morning. The flush seemed to have come to stay. It made him feel irritable, nervous, like a broody hen. He fingered his chin. The three-days-old growth on it emphasized to him his frayed untidiness.

The barrow went forward to the gangway and, under the gimlet eyes of some Europeans, McQuat and his comrades received the mail.

"Look at that one in khaki," he heard a

lady remark to the man beside her. "He's quite white!"

"Some Spanish offshoot, perhaps, or a throw-back of sorts, I should say," replied the man learnedly through his nose. "But he's more of a redskin as regards colour."

A throw-back! A Spanish offshoot! With lowered head, his mild blue eyes full of indignant tears, Alexis McQuat pushed the barrow back to the Post Office. The Klings on the other side of the barrow were coldly silent. He had spoken angrily to their foreman in a strange language. He was not one of themselves. The foreman treated him with marked disdain and, on arriving at their destination, reported him to Mr. Bunn, the Eurasian Second Assistant Postmaster-General, for smelling of liquor when on duty.

McQuat's pleasure in hearing this important official, after sniffing, announce that he did not believe the foreman's tale was dimmed by the official's further remark that every one knew that nowadays the accused never had the price of a drink on him.

"I care for none of ye," he announced wrath-

fully. "I resign, that's what I do. Gie me ma money."

"How much do we owe this chap?" asked Mr. Bunn contemptuously.

The Kling foreman told him. It was a small amount; but sufficient to get a shave with.

Late in the afternoon the Post Office saw Alexis again. He had been a round of the hotels in the interim, and the barmen had unanimously assured him that, as usual, the Government had maltreated one of the best fellows that ever lived. The confidence he had gained from these friends of his did not extend, however, to his gait, which now exhibited a certain liveliness. The creak of the hand-rail as he ascended the wooden stairs leading to the counter told of his need of support sideways. But his tread was firm enough.

"Now, ma mannie," he cried joyfully through the open window, "have you got any letters for the name of Campbell?"

There was one. The clerk, after a glance, handed it over the counter, and with a half-smile at his fellow-clerks watched the best-known beach-comber in Jallagar walk slowly down the

creaking wooden steps and wander on in an aimless fashion towards the town. Over the forbidden grass borders of the Post Office lawn the man walked, and the clerk, frowning slightly, saw he had the letter open. He stumbled on to a flower-bed and stood there gaping in the brilliant sunlight. Then with a cry of surprise he turned and walked quickly back and up the stairs again.

"Ma mannie," he said, with an air of owning the Post Office, "I'll be troubling you to change this ten-pun-note."

Breathing hard, he flourished the crinkly piece of paper in front of the clerk.

He was, he saw, causing a stir in the office. Yes, he was getting known. The clerks were looking at him with respect.

"Is it yours?" asked the fellow at the counter, taking it.

"Is it mine? Dod drat it! Is it mine? Yes! An' I can get a gey whin mair fra' the place it comes fra'."

They were taking it away into an inner room. There was a delay. Yes, he was getting known. He stuck out his chest.

"We're the boys," he told the Malay clerk at the counter.

Still further delay ! A cold thought struck him. Perhaps they had not sufficient money in the Post Office to change such a large sum. He himself had experienced difficulties over much smaller sums than ten pounds.

"Tell the boss," he whispered eagerly, "tae let me have some of it the noo onyway. I'll come for the rest in the morning."

A moment later they paid him. He went away with ninety silver Mexican dollars in his trousers pocket, feeling pleasantly lopsided.

"Guid nicht to ye," he said condescendingly. "A'll be making a straight track for home the noo."

His home apparently lay in a zigzag direction. Taverns filled with enthusiastic friends dotted the way to it. Somewhere towards morning one of these saw him over the final stage of his journey, and left him on the doorstep of his hut. He was singing "Bonnie Mary of Argyle" for the fifth time, and singing it, so he thought, well, when a Sikh policeman came up and gently pushed him inside his door. He fell asleep, debating

within himself whether he had too many friends, or his friends were too many for him, or he was too many for his friends. He could not be sure what was the trouble, but he had an idea that it must be the latter, and this thought made him chuckle as he slept.

.

In the house next door Mrs. Vanderpump turned wearily once or twice on her sleeping-mat, and then, muttering something about the inconvenience of semi-detached bungalows combined with neighbours who became musical after midnight, half rose and punched her pillow vigorously.

"I shall have to see to him to-morrow morning," she said to herself.

On most days she merely "did for" Mr. McQuat. It was only after these infrequent musical evenings that she had to see to him. For years now "doing" for him and sewing for the European ladies of Jallagar had been her principal means of support. Her late husband, Vanderpump, the Pelung policeman, had been dead so long that she had grown almost to look upon him as a youthful folly. He in his time

had been a man requiring "seeing to" very often. McQuat was a flea-bite to him.

In spite of them both she was still buxom enough. Maybe it was her buxomness and a certain straight way she had with her that had kept Alexis a tenant of the other half of the tiny bungalow for so many years. She dressed on week days in bajus and sarongs, with her slightly grizzled hair coiled anyhow on the back of her head, and anything on her feet, sandals, grass slippers, men's white shoes, clogs when in the wash-house. Sometimes, seldom though, she went unshod, and McQuat knew that her feet were pretty and her ankles slim.

Alexis had a disposition that had failed from birth to give satisfaction. This was when he was young, and had been put down locally to the fact that he was brought up on the bottle. All his life he had stood in awe of his mother. Now he stood in awe of Mrs. Vanderpump. She was very strict with him. Sometimes she hardly spoke to him. He used to watch her on Sunday leaving the tumbledown little bungalow on her way to Mass, and was never tired of wondering where she got all the clothes. On such

days he modestly kept out of her way in the street. There were other days when she was as pleasant as summer, saints' days when she would kill a superfluous chicken and invite him to the festival.

The worst of McQuat was that festival meant to him merely the opening of many bottles. This was tiresome stupidity in Mrs. Vanderpump's eyes ; and festivals lately had been few and far between.

Her knock at the door always made him start—when he heard it. After musical evenings it was hard work making him hear.

“Mr. McQuat !”

“M-i-s-t-e-r M-c-Q-u-a-t !”

The sunlight streamed into the tiny room, lighting up the bed draped in white mosquito netting, the reed walls, the discoloured almanac, shining with the intensity of a searchlight upon the elderly, khaki-clad figure of Mr. McQuat as it lay sprawling on the floor. The brim of the topee, half parted from the crown, was still on his head, jammed hard there by one of his friends the previous evening. He slept peacefully.

"Mr. McQuat! Am I to stand here all morning?"

A shiver crept through the form of the sleeper. Mr. McQuat started on to his knees, looked about guiltily, went noiselessly over to the bed and ruffled it. He rose to his feet.

"Come in, Mrs. Vanderpump," he shouted heartily. "An' hoo are we this morning?"

"You're getting quite the gentleman," said the widow tartly, entering. "Lying abed till all hours."

"I been out of bed this long time," said Alexis truthfully. "I was a wee bit late getting home last nicht."

"Yes, you were. I heard you. You and your Mary of Argyle! What do you think Mary of Argyle would say to you if she could see you now?"

"There's nothing the matter wi' me."

"What about your topee, then?" cried the widow, laughing in spite of herself. "Look at yourself, look at yourself if you can find a glass that won't crack at the sight of you. Jemima! But you are a proper guy! And this is the lord, if you please, that comes home with the milk,

shouting about Mary of Argyle, a woman two hundred years old if she's a day, and a woman that he knows nothing about whatever. Oh yes ! I heard a policeman playing skittles with you last night—a filthy Sikh policeman. And you call yourself a European ! I've a good mind not to make you any breakfast."

Mr. McQuat was understood to say that he did not want any breakfast.

"You'll eat your breakfast," said Mrs. Vanderpump, eyeing him with great firmness. "I know what you're after, you artful man ! What you want to be now is an invalid. But nursing's not in my line, no, thank you."

She bustled through into the cook-house, and in a very few minutes came back with a teapot and bread on a tray. She poured out a cup.

"There !" she said. "Eat some bread and have a drink of hot tea. I'll come in later and tidy round. And," she went on, stooping and picking up an envelope from the floor, "don't leave your letters lying about or I shall get to know your secrets, and when I get to know them, Mr. McQuat, well, look out, for

you'll never have another moment's peace on this earth ! ”

She put the envelope on the table beside him and, saying again that she would be back a little later to tidy round, went back to her own side of the bungalow.

It was the letter he had received the day before. There had been no time to read it. He picked it up and opened it languidly. It ran :

“ MY DEAR SON,

“ You will be glad to hear that Father and I celebrate our golden wedding to-day. One of our greatest pleasures is to think you have done so well abroad and been a credit to us. We are sorry not to have seen you for so long, but hope you will come home on a visit soon. Please accept this ten pounds from us to buy a present to celebrate this golden wedding of ours. We want you to have something in that great big house of yours that we ourselves gave you on this our happy day.

“ With love to my son,

“ Your Mother,

“ JANET CAMPBELL.”

Alexis McQuat read the letter twice and then put it down on the table. His face wore a very odd expression.

“God forgie me for deceiving them,” he muttered at last.

CHAPTER IV

I DON'T know why you should give me the reins," remarked the professor.

"It tires me to hold them," explained Miss Vannery, looking down at the little yellow cat, her lips twitching slightly.

"But how do you know I can drive?"

"I don't know. We never drive in Jallagar. When we lift the reins Polly starts, when we put them down she stops."

The mare took some holding in spite of what Miss Vannery had said. Soon they were clear of the crowded street, and bowling along an open piece of road with broad turf on either side flanked by low hedges. Not until then did he venture to look round. She was still playing with the kitten.

"It's quite recovered from its fright," he remarked.

"Say 'he'—he's a person, is Snicketty."

"He very nearly wasn't."

"But you were there——"

The road turned sharply, rose suddenly, and passed over a short bridge spanning a ditch that drained the swampy coco-nut plantations beyond the hedges. The dog-cart jolted, the mare stumbled and almost fell.

"Luckily," she ended.

"A nasty bend that," muttered Haliburton J. The mare was fidgeting. He had to hold her in. Although he could not spare an eye for Miss Vannery at the moment, he was aware that she was doing much the same with her cat.

"I ought to have told you about it," she said apologetically. "It's the only surprise in the road except the turn in to the Residency drive."

She stopped speaking, and he saw that she was looking at him reflectively.

"At the Residency you will get another surprise," she said, a moment later.

"Nothing dreadful, I hope."

"Cats," she replied monosyllabically.

"Cats?"

"I hope you're fond of them?" she asked,

in a tone of some anxiety. "You are, aren't you?"

"Well—er—at any rate, I'm neutral."

"I'm glad of that," she said, looking relieved.

"I don't know that I quite approve of the moral characters of some of them," he went on.

"You'll get to know them better," she laughed. "Why don't you like them?"

"They're secretive, and pretend not to be," began Haliburton J., trying to sparkle. "A dog, now, with a secret always looks downcast. A cat hates water, and makes a pretence of loving washing, whilst a dog loves water, and hates washing. In short, the cat is a humbug and the dog is not."

"There's a dignity about a cat," she pointed out, "that no dog ever has. Some dogs aim at it, but they merely achieve heaviness. There is eloquence and grace about a cat."

"A cat never wags its tail," retorted the professor.

"A cat never needs to. Remember, there is such a thing as being too happy to wag one's tail, a condition approximating to that of the

Nirvana aimed at by the Buddhists. Buddhists and Egyptians understood the cat far better than we do. They observed that a cat never laughed. They knew that a cat had no desire to brag about being happy. What is laughter but bragging about being happy? Also they could never tell what a cat was thinking, and they deduced from that fact that a cat cared nothing for any one's opinion. Knowing what sad havoc the possession of a conscience or, what amounts to the same thing, a respect for the opinion of others, can play with a person's happiness, they revered intensely the animal which had educated itself out of the possession of such an undesirable heritage. Hence cat-worship."

"But isn't cat-worship merely ancestor-worship?" asked the professor, puzzled.

"They may have thought that the cat was an ancestor who, beholding his descendants, was too pained to laugh," agreed Melita consideringly. "That point had never struck me. I will mention it to my father. He'll be pleased. It's wonderful what a fresh mind will sometimes do on an old problem."

"You have put the matter in a new light.

I had never considered cats in that way," murmured the professor. "I haven't thought much about them at all, to tell the truth."

"I am merely quoting my father," Melita said, laughing. "I know very little about cats either. I love dogs. I merely like cats. But my father's so keen on cats. He thinks it's an insult to mention them in the same breath as dogs, so I seldom mention dogs. That's a hint."

"Thanks," murmured Haliburton J.

"He says that the cat is the only animal with the Greek view of life. He's so—so very keen on cats," she went on doubtfully. "Every one must have a hobby in a place like this, mustn't they?"

"I should say so," said the professor in a cheerful voice. "A very interesting hobby too."

"He's trying to get back to the old Egyptian breed now. The breed has been lost, you know."

"But I don't know."

"Well, now I've told you," said Melita.

"Oh, I shall remember."

"I want you to. That's why I have taken such pains."

"You're kind."

"That's gratitude for favours to come," she murmured, laughing nervously.

He looked a shade surprised.

"Yes, it is," she went on rather hurriedly. "You see—my father—the subject is so important to him. He thinks of little else but cats nowadays. I—I am fond of cats. But there's nobody else on the island that cares a rap about them, except the Postmaster-General, Mr. Kamp. He and father are inseparable friends, and I am sure—I am sure they would like it if they found you sympathetic. You'll think us all mad."

"Not at all! Not at all!" muttered Haliburton J. politely.

"You look bewildered," she said with a laugh, discarding the trace of earnestness in her tone. "Not quite fit to be trusted to take Snicketty and me round this bend safely. Will you give me the reins? It's almost the only bit of road in Jallagar that wants knowing."

The dog-cart swung into an avenue of flowering acacias, passed a lake where a flock of teal swam and dipped amid water-lilies, and finally

came abreast of a large, rambling, two-storied house, painted white and roofed with blood-red tiles.

"Now to introduce an American cat-lover to the world of cats," said Miss Vannery in a low voice, pulling up under the portico. "Take Snicketty, and hold him tenderly in your arms as you enter."

Two Chinese boys, dressed in white silk, came running down the broad stairway and aided in the accomplishment of a semi-regal entrance. The outer hall at the top of the stairs was a blaze of orchids. These in moss-covered baskets and pots hung suspended from the high ceiling and lined the walls.

It was amid their unordered colours and wild hothouse scent that Professor Bliss took his first view of the Resident's daughter at home. Holding the little yellow cat, he followed her up two or three steps and entered a narrow veranda where a magnificent black tom-cat was sunning itself. The creature gave him or the kitten he was holding a stony look. Farther along this strip of veranda—it seemed to run all round the bungalow—they came upon other cats, lying also in the

patches of sunlight that, evading the bamboo sun-blinds, dappled the polished floors. Everywhere stood vases of ferns and tubs containing tropical flowering shrubs. The air was warm and heavy. The scent of the flowers was not at all refreshing. Presently to it was added the smell of Egyptian tobacco. Professor Bliss heard the faint click of billiard balls.

"Here is Professor Bliss," said Melita Vannery, pulling aside a curtain.

Haliburton J. went in after her, carrying the cat.

The little grey-haired man at the billiard table was in the act of preparing to make a stroke with a rest about three times his height. He turned nervously at the sound of the girl's voice; the rest clattered to the floor. The little man made a nervous motion as if longing to pick it up, recollected himself in time, and advanced with dignity across the wide space that separated the door from the billiard table.

"Your arrival had been notified to me," he said on reaching Haliburton J. "I fear you must have had a hot drive up. Unfortunately the Government cannot regulate the power of

the sun. If it could, it would have done so this morning."

"I feel quite fresh, thank you, Mr.——" Haliburton J. began.

"Yes, this is my father, the Resident," said the smiling Melita. "Hasn't Snicketty taken to him, father?"

"Snicketty has good reasons, that may be depended on in any cat," responded Mr. Vannery. "They are governed by reason, not by impulse. They——"

He pulled himself up and began stroking nervously his large white moustache.

"But Snicketty mustn't forget his mistress," cried the young lady. "He must come with her to make himself tidy for breakfast."

She gently detached the kitten from the professor's white-clad bosom and bore it away.

"Strange creatures, cats," muttered Mr. Vannery, watching her go. "Much more of an influence over the affairs of humanity than the average person thinks. I wonder if she really is its mistress, or whether——"

Haliburton J. noticed the gleam in his small

blue eyes and the expression of interest that for a moment was illuminating his face.

"A most intelligent cat," muttered Mr. Vannery. "Worthy of a better name than Snicketty."

On meeting Haliburton J.'s sympathetic but, it must be confessed, rather astonished gaze, the light faded from his eyes. His face became impassive.

"Oh, Professor Bliss," he said courteously. "Really it was most kind of you to come. I fear you must have had a hot drive."

"I feel quite fresh, thank you," Haliburton J. told him again, this time with a little emphasis.

The Resident looked slightly puzzled.

"I've heard a similar remark this morning already. You said it, did you not, Kamp?"

"No, sir, I did not," returned a fat gentleman on the other side of the billiard table, who until now had been eyeing the new-comer superciliously.

"No? That's most extraordinary. Well, no matter. I hear so many remarks in the course of the day. It would be quite impossible for me to remember who made them all."

"You could not spare de dime," went on the fat gentleman.

"You are quite correct, Kamp, I could not," agreed the Resident. "I never seem to have time to spare. Mr. Bliss will find that out. I hope he stands the strain of work in this dreadful climate. Consider for an instant, Mr. Bliss, our velocity of living compared with that of the Laplander, or, to take a more familiar instance, the Boston business man. The two latter, living as they do somewhere near the North Pole—how near I have forgotten—are being carried through space by the earth in its revolutions at about half the velocity that I am ; is that not so ?"

"It is," agreed the professor.

"Ah, then, knowing that, you'll appreciate the difference between Boston and Jallagar. There's a whirling here. When to the whirling is added the constant signing of minute papers and the reading of abusive letters from the Secretariat at Pelung, of which my work for the Government principally consists, the strain becomes intolerable."

"It must do," murmured Haliburton J.

"Luckily I have my cats ; a wonderful

resource when one gets overheated. Stroking a cat gently has saved me from resigning my position more than once. Wonderful the calmness of soul the gentle stroking of a cat induces—but, dear me.”

“We dalk much of cats in Jallagar,” explained Kamp, in a fat voice, noticing Haliburton J.’s puzzled air.

“I forgot for the moment that Professor Bliss is, rather strange to things here,” the Resident admitted. “But you must have had a hot drive up. You look warm. Can I offer you anything?”

“No, thanks,” said Haliburton J.

“I thought perhaps a cold bath or even a wash ; but, of course, if you prefer——”

The boom of a big gong announcing breakfast caused the Resident to withdraw the suggestion.

A moment later Haliburton J. and the fat gentleman followed his pompous little figure into the breakfast-room.

CHAPTER V.

ALL the Jallagar Residency—and that means more than one building—clusters round the Jallagar Residency dining-room. In the design of this room the architect has surpassed himself. The timber roof is arched like that of a Norman chapel. The walls are panelled with rare tropical woods from the forests on the mainland. The round table is carved in one piece from a giant teak tree.

Even in the 'forties Residents and Commandants had correct ideas of what was due to them. Some of the china the first of the line left behind him was on the breakfast-table now—Worcester stamped with the Royal Arms. The latest of the line of Residents poured milk into a saucer of the make, and called one of the silk-clad Chinese boys to take it. An immense punkah, swinging lazily above, blew a petal from a flower on the large silver table centre—also a relic of the 'forties—into

the saucer. The Resident at once poured the milk into a slop-basin and bade the boy bring more.

"Why, father?" murmured Melita.

"She had kittens this morning," explained Mr. Vannery. "It's a most critical time for her. A strange taste in the milk and she's capable of eating them."

"A very important cat," explained Melita solemnly to Haliburton J., who was toying with his first iced papaw and liking it. "We are expecting great results from her. She—may I tell Professor Bliss, father?"

"Really——" said Mr. Vannery, looking disturbed. "I don't think so. It's not a matter that would interest him."

"It would, I am certain," insisted Melita. "He loves cats. They take to him. Didn't you see, Mr. Kamp, how Snicketty was clinging to him as we entered?"

The fat gentleman said he did, but pointed out that, rather than fall, a cat will cling to anything.

"Professor Bliss saved his life," Melita informed the company. "That's why Snicketty clung so close."

She went on to describe the incident on the wharf. Haliburton J. learnt for the first time that he had jumped down quite twenty feet from the ship's deck in order to effect the rescue. She multiplied the size of the dog by three, and dwelt on the blood-stained foam that had dripped from its mouth.

"It bit Professor Bliss in the leg and then went mad," she ended.

"And where is it now?" asked the fat Swede with an air of deep interest.

"I caught a glimpse of it lurking underneath the Post Office as we drove by," replied Melita calmly. "It looked terrible. Foam was still dripping from its mouth."

"*Gott im Himmel!*" murmured the fat Swede, looking about him in dismay.

"It was sitting quite close to your office door. I knew you would feel annoyed about it being there," said Melita brightly.

"I vill drive it away with sticks," announced the fat Swede firmly. "I vill drive it away by my men on the telephone before I arrive at the office. Please excuse."

He rose, and bowing twice from the waist,

once to Miss Vannery and once to the Resident, vanished. The grinding noise that at once came from somewhere near at hand was, as Haliburton J. found out later, the Government telephone being brought into action against the mad dog. A bell rang. A door opened.

"It seems to me almost an omen," announced the Resident solemnly.

Melita said she thought it was a miracle. Why the dog should have gone mad after biting Mr. Bliss she could not understand, especially as it tasted the trousers only and not the calf. The trousers, too, in her opinion looked like ordinary trousers. In fact, there was no deception anywhere.

In answer to a question the young American, blushing for the first time since leaving home, said he had bought the garments in question at Memphis.

"At Memphis!" screamed the little Resident, jumping out of his chair. "Why, that explains it! There you have it, Melita! At Memphis, great and glorious city, capital of Menes, site of the temples of Ptah and Ra, home of the original tortoise-shell cat! No wonder the dog went

mad after biting those trousers. He has felt the vengeance of the gods! Ha ha! It is more than an omen." He stopped; then, as if recollecting himself, said in a calmer tone, "I mean—it looks as if the ancient gods of the Nile have sent their aid to us wrapped round the legs of this young stranger."

"It is curious," admitted Melita, glancing quizzically at the bewildered professor.

"I'll be bound you acquired the garment without much trouble," continued Mr. Vannery knowingly. "Perchance a mysterious dealer gave them in for nothing when you purchased a scarab or other trifle from him? Or maybe you found them lying on the banks of the Nile and picked them up?"

Professor Bliss, looking rather hurt, explained that he had purchased them in a store in the ordinary way. He said that in Tennessee people didn't leave their clothes lying about.

"In Tennessee?" echoed the Resident, puzzled.

"Professor Bliss means Memphis, Tennessee," explained Melita.

"I was born there," said Haliburton J. simply.

The Resident, obviously rather disappointed, sat down again and said that it did not matter. He said that he had heard that Tennessee was a "dry" State. So, it was notorious, was Egypt.

"And they grow cotton in both places, I believe, father," added Melita.

"So they do," muttered the Resident thoughtfully. "There must be some explanation—I have it, Melita! Yes! To grow the cotton the Americans imported slaves from Africa. Now it must be apparent even to persons of ordinary perception that the Americans sought slaves conversant with the best methods of cotton-growing. These slaves were to be found in Egypt. The chief town in the cotton district is Memphis. You see the connection?"

Melita said she did. She said that she had been wondering where Mr. Bliss had got his complexion from.

"That's wicked of you," said the professor, smiling. "Besides, you're wrong. I'm pure Scots. My mother was a Campbell. Both my parents come from Aberdeen in Scotland."

"I could have hazarded a guess to that effect,"

said Mr. Vannery at once, looking very acute. "You see the connection, Melita?"

Miss Vannery shook her head.

"No? Well, I'll explain. It's most interesting, and quite in accordance with what I have read regarding ancient Egyptian procedure. First of all, let us take it that the trousers were ordained to be sent as a sign to Jallagar. It was an easy matter to convey them to the nearest dry goods store at Memphis, not so easy, however, to ensure that the right person should buy them. It was not sufficient that the person should be going to Jallagar. He would have also to be a person of frugal mind, one who could be implicitly relied on to keep a fast hold on the garments throughout the long journey and deliver them safely in Jallagar. What more obvious and yet more subtle than to select as this instrument of theirs a man of pure Aberdonian descent?"

"How very interesting!" remarked Melita pleasantly. "Don't you think so, professor?"

Haliburton J. indicated that he was as yet strange to the East, and he wanted time to grasp the matter. He pointed out that his subjects were mathematics and political economy.

"There you are !" cried the Resident, whose tint was now a triumphant purple. "A man of Aberdonian descent studying economy in some form or another at his university. The task of selection was not difficult for the gods, was it ? Where is Kamp ?" he went on. "I must relate this story to him. He will be most interested."

"And in the meantime let me tell Professor Bliss all about the tortoise-shell cats," suggested Melita.

"Not till Kamp comes," said the Resident firmly.

"Why not ?" asked the girl. "Surely, father," she went on eagerly, "everything is quite clear. Professor Bliss loves cats—he told me so ; and he has a strong influence over them. Mr. Kamp cannot say anything against him, and, besides, you are the Resident, are you not ?"

"That's nothing to do with it," Mr. Vannery rejoined irritably. "Kamp and I are partners in this matter. I can't tell others our affairs without his acquiescence."

"Then I wish he'd be quick," said Melita

petulantly. "The more you make a friend of him, father, the fatter he seems to get."

"A man of great ability, Professor Bliss," said the Resident pointedly.

"Indeed?"

"He attracted my notice at once. He was appointed Postmaster-General only a year ago. We were troubled with a plague of cockroaches; they ate all the gum off the stamps. Three days after his appointment he invented a gum which applied to the stamps at once killed off any cockroach that tackled them. From that day he has never looked back."

"Pish!" muttered Melita, tapping her knife on the table impatiently.

"Some of the natives don't like him, however," admitted the Resident. "They bought stamps for their children's stamp collections, and for other purposes after the new gum had been invented. But, as I always say, some minority always suffers through the world's progress. You recollect the cotton spinney—I mean jenny?"

"Quite," said Haliburton J.

"He is not liked also because of his manner

with the Malays," broke in Melita in a tone Haliburton J. had not heard her use before. "He considers them beneath him; he treats them rudely and contemptuously. Any one in a lower position than himself he tries to crush," she went on, apparently carried out of herself, "whilst he fawns and cringes to his betters in a perfectly sickening manner."

"No, no, you ought not to say such things," said Mr. Vannery, looking deeply annoyed.

"You are quite right," confessed Miss Vannery, flushing. "I'm sorry."

Haliburton J. eyed her with the admiration of a man who has had his prejudices satisfactorily voiced.

"A most capable and reliable officer," insisted Mr. Vannery. "I have arranged to put you with him in the meantime, Professor Bliss, as his assistant."

"Oh, I did not know that," cried Melita. "Well. You'll be able to learn how to ill-treat the natives," she remarked unfeelingly.

But Professor Bliss was pleased to think that he read sympathy in her glance. Later he was not surprised to find himself more absorbed in

watching her demeanour in the presence of the man she so obviously disliked than in the question of whether or no he should be admitted to a knowledge of this, to him, rather unimportant matter concerning cats.

The fat Swede had come back with a voice exhausted by his efforts at driving the mad dog away from his office through two miles of telephone wire. Boys summoned to his aid brought a further supply of coffee and sausages. He ate noisily, with a suspicious little blue eye fastened on Haliburton J., whilst the Resident told the tale of how the dog went mad. Then, speaking with his mouth full, he pointed out that although a man might be selected as an instrument, it did not follow that he was under the protection of Isis.

"Anyone used as an instrument by Isis is certainly under the protection of Ptah," stated the Resident.

The two argued learnedly.

"Professor Bliss knows all about cats," repeated Melita. "Don't be so cautious. It's not important surely. He's very fond of cats."

"Had one in my cradle from birth," affirmed

Haliburton J., seconding her efforts. "Used to share my milk with it when it would let me. Had to leave more than one town in South Carolina because stray cats mistook me for a home.

"Den if you are zo fond," demanded the fat Swede, turning on him suddenly, "dell me the colour of a real tortoise-shell cat."

"Er—black, yellow and——" began Haliburton J. His wandering eyes caught Melita's. She pointed to the hibiscus she was wearing, and nodded emphatically. "Black, yellow and red," answered Haliburton J. briskly. He had been going to say white.

The fat Swede, evidently much disappointed, repulsed the boy who was handing him another dish of sausages, and was silent.

"Ah," remarked Mr. Vannery, just as obviously pleased. "I am glad you belong to our school of thought. I've no patience with those self-styled authorities who assert that the ancient Egyptian tortoise-shell had fawn and black markings only."

"Neither have I," smiled Melita, looking at Haliburton J.

"Nor I," said Haliburton J., smiling back.

"We must tell him, Kamp," said the Resident indecisively. "Yes, we must. He evidently knows more about cats than any one on the island."

"Very well," agreed Kamp grudgingly.

"I can't but look on your arrival, Professor Bliss, as at least of good augury," pursued Mr. Vannery pompously. "It synchronizes with an interesting event in this household. At the moment your steamer was entering the harbour a cat upstairs had just brought into the world kittens. Not an ordinary cat, I may tell you, but a cat of three colours, black, red, and yellow, especially imported by me and of proved Egyptian strain. From this cat we are expecting great things."

"She has now five kittens," put in Kamp.

"She is a tortoise-shell cat," went on Mr. Vannery still more pompously. "And, I need hardly point out, a female; for as you are well aware, male tortoise-shell cats are not known."

"Not k——, quite so," said Haliburton J., catching Melita's look. He now learned the fact of the scarcity of this class of cat for the first time.

"There have been cases, father," put in Melita.

"Impostures," snapped the Resident.

"The cat offered to the British Museum some time in the 'eighties," persisted Melita argumentatively.

"Quite unauthenticated," declared the Resident. "No, although the natives of the Archipelago may have them, as rumour says, at the present moment, the male true tortoise-shell is not known to Europeans, unless—unless one has come into the world this morning in the cats' room upstairs. We will all go now and learn our fate in this respect."

"You and Mr. Kamp go," suggested Melita. "I want to show Professor Bliss the garden."

"Please excuse, but I tink he should come with us," muttered the Swede.

"But I think differently," returned Melita sweetly.

She had her way, and presently led the professor into a shady part of the garden. Here the famous Resident of 1840 had, with an eye to the requirements of future generations, planted an avenue of acacia-trees—trees that were now

become giants. Later rulers of the island had inlaid the rugged trunks with many kinds of orchids, which now were flowering in profusion.

"You have gathered, perhaps, that I don't like Mr. Adolphus Kamp," said Melita.

"I have."

"Every one does gather it."

"Then he ought to hate himself," said Haliburton J. fiercely.

"Well, he doesn't do that," returned Melita with conviction. "As for the cats. You—you see how things are?"

"I've got a glimmering, but it's not too clear."

"I think the Egyptian part is stupid," sighed Melita. "But I'm so anxious to get this tortoise-shell tom-cat. It's upsetting father terribly, his worrying so much about it. You are going to help, aren't you?"

The famous Resident of 1840, with abnormal foresight, had arranged his avenue so that when the trees were grown there should be a vista of shimmering plain and—weather permitting—turquoise sea.

"I should simply hate it if Mr. Kamp got

the tortoise-shell," remarked Melita. "We'll go back now and see what they have found in the cats' room."

Gloom reigned in the Residency. The fat Swede had disappeared. Mr. Vannery paced the veranda alone.

"She has eaten them," he announced in answer to their inquiries.

CHAPTER VI

JUST as all Jallagar Residency clusters round the Residency dining-room, so all Jallagar clusters round the Residency. Malays, turning to Mecca at time of prayer, find themselves facing the rambling, white-painted stronghold of Empire on the hill-top. The Chinese, too, are under its domination. All day they see it proudly rearing its battlements against the sun. And at evening, from their quarter of the town, they watch the self-same sun descend and disappear into the Residency cookhouse, to be used, so it is rumoured among the children, by the Residency cook for cooking the Resident's dinner.

To these children the Residency cook is the most important person on the island. But to the Europeans in the bungalows that occupy the hill, the Resident's lady is an object of greater reverence. They respect the cook. All do who have eaten

his dinners. But, after all, it is the lady who issues the invitations.

Dinners at Jallagar Residency, or even cards for the Friday at-homes, are not for every one. Sometimes, when the wife of the reigning Resident happens to be of a frugal mind or exclusive tastes, those on the list of possible guests are painfully few in number. Even under the democratic Melita not all the Europeans in Jallagar, by any means, were to be met at the Residency on such occasions.

Alexis McQuat, for instance, was never to be seen there. It is doubtful, indeed, whether Alexis, living as he did in the Eurasian quarter, knew of these Fridays. Mrs. Vanderpump knew of them certainly, a good part of her living being earned by the cutting out, turning, and otherwise manipulating frocks for prospective guests. But it never struck her to talk about her customers to McQuat.

He was, of course, aware that she sewed and that she managed by this means and by the selling of eggs to earn some sort of a living. Indeed, more than once he had earned a dollar and obliged her at the same time by carrying light

and bulky packages to one or other of the bungalows on the hill-top. He never thought much about her sewing. All women sewed. It was not a gift, but a sign of respectability. Egg-laying, on the other hand, was certainly a gift. And the prolific hens next door interested him more than the sewing did.

It was as a seller of eggs that Professor Bliss first met the widow. After a fortnight on the island he had contracted some slight ailment that necessitated his maintaining existence for a time on raw eggs and milk. So bad was his luck with the eggs supplied by natives that he at last wrote to Melita asking for help. The Government machinery clicked and post haste to him came Mrs. Vanderpump.

The professor had before this illness settled down in a small bungalow, the cook-house of which contained a cook of large size and proved rapacity. The cook's youngest brother, late of the Island of Hainan, was house-boy, the cook's elderly uncle, secured at immense pains—so it was understood—by the cook, was water carrier.

These gentlemen the professor had up before

him every morning when first he started house-keeping, and essayed to tell them what he thought of them with the aid of a Malay dictionary compiled by a missionary. It was an impossible task, and although the Chinamen, if their faces spoke the truth, enjoyed his efforts, he gave it up after the first month and contented himself with paying the cook's enormous household bills like a man, and returning thanks to Providence for a good dinner when he got one.

Once he had been on the point of trying to get another cook when he learned by accident that his retainer was vice-chairman of the Chinese Servants' Secret Society in the island. The knowledge that Adolphus Kamp had but a short while before discharged the society's chairman, and, servantless since, was subsisting on beer and sausages, restrained him. Kamp, it was whispered, had been sentenced by the society to be kept cookless for one month.

It was plain that some part of the frequent exhibitions of bad temper to which Kamp treated his subordinates, and the sound of grunting and stamping of feet that was to be heard in his private office of a morning, might be put down to

this lack of domestic ministration, and Haliburton J. resolved devoutly never to be in the same case himself.

Bunn, the Assistant Postmaster-General, a highly respectable, ebony-coloured gentleman who claimed to be an Eurasian, but who was, rumour said, the only child of a Bombay merchant and an African Hottentot, bore most of the brunt of these office tornadoes. And as it was directly under that gentleman that Haliburton J. had been placed in order to learn the first steps of the postmaster's art, he also came sufficiently within their pathway to feel uncomfortable.

At first he had felt sorry for Bunn, but stopped being so when he found that Bunn never seemed to be particularly sorry for himself, craving apparently for notoriety rather than reputation. Only once did the fellow appear seriously annoyed. That was when Kamp, having put him for the day in charge of the sorting department, the other and rival Assistant Postmaster-General being away ill, accused him of deliberately post-marking letters upside down. The professor heard him muttering afterwards that he should postmark them inside out if he so wished ; and

also that he would do the same to any one who tried to stop him.

"In G.P.O. at Pelung they postmark them any old way," he muttered.

"But Mr. Kamp wants them done right side up," pointed out Haliburton J., zealous for discipline.

"Mr. Kamp is not 'fallible, sah," rejoined Bunn in a tone of some contempt. "He Swede. We British have no time for these Swedes, sah. We rank them with the natives, I assure you. I myself was once American citizen in Manila, but am now British subject. Once using stars and stripes, but now the lion and unicorn."

"You must feel something like a Bengal tiger nowadays," Haliburton J. suggested.

Bunn looked doubtful, but admitted that he often did, though during office hours he did not care to show it. There were other spheres, however, he hinted, a Mrs. Bunn and "one offspring" who occasionally required chastening. There was the native population to be kept in its place and taught to respect officials, and also poor whites whom he, Bunn, occasionally was constrained to hold in check.

The professor had an object lesson on the way half-caste officials treated these latter the next day. It was in the early morning. The incoming mail steamer had been signalled and the whole of the Post Office was, as usual, waiting tense with anxiety to receive the weekly mail from Pelung. Having seen to it that the inside of his office was all in order, the Second Assistant Postmaster-General, as the person responsible for the efficient working of the hand-barrow, had gone outside to consult with his chief. The professor, at his table facing the window, could see the two of them standing on the wooden entrance veranda a few yards away. At their back, in the midst of the shimmering ocean, sailed the approaching mail boat. Behind again, showing faint against the blue sky, were mountains, and to the right was a clump of heavily-laden coco-nut palms.

It was a peaceful, satisfactory sort of scene. Bunn was, as usual, successfully concealing the Bengal tiger strain in his disposition. He was showing his white teeth, but not ferociously. Presently he affected to laugh. Evidently Kamp, as he sometimes did when in fair temper, had

made a bad joke. Both were clad in white. They cooed like two turtle doves. All was well.

Shortly after, Haliburton J., still looking dreamily out of the window, saw Kamp go away. In his stead appeared a decayed-looking white man, the man in fact that he had noticed beside the mail-barrow on the morning of his arrival at Jallagar.

From the expression on the white man's face he evidently wanted something from Bunn. Bunn, immaculate in clean suit and topee, his black face shining with perspiration and prosperity, hummed a tune. He, it was plain, knew the stranger was near and wanted something. But he affected ignorance.

"Hello, cocky!" said the white man at last, impatiently.

"What, sah!" exclaimed Bunn, turning round with great sharpness.

"Hello!" said the white man rather more feebly. This time he evidently thought it wise to miss out the "cocky." "A'm wanting a job pushing your mail-barrow."

"We've got no job for you, my man," said Bunn importantly. He turned away.

"A'm no your man," the stranger informed him with some sign of heat. "An' I dinna want your job. That is," he added, on second thoughts, "if you havena got a job for me."

"Go," Bunn commanded grandly, pointing to the stairs. "Leave the Government premises before we lose our patience with you."

"And you're not going to give me a job?" asked the man.

"Certainly not," roared Bunn, in his Bengal tiger voice. "You have just said that you do not require job," he went on sarcastically. "But it is the same in any case. We have no jobs for you here."

With head held high in the air and waving his sun umbrella he sauntered towards the office.

"Hey!" called out the white man after him. "Could ye no give me a washing job?"

"What washing job?" asked Bunn, turning sharply round in the doorway.

"Tryin' to wash a dirty son of a Hottentot white!" cried the white man in an indignant voice.

He went away jauntily enough, but Hali-burton J., watching, saw the despondent gait into

which he dropped on reaching the road. He vanished in the direction of the town. Something made Haliburton J. a minute later get up from his chair and follow. He found the vagrant leaning against a brick pillar in the shadow of one of the coal-sheds.

He answered the professor's "Good morning" affably enough, and added in broad Scotch that the sky looked a wee bit stormy like, and that he "dooted we micht see rain afore the nicht."

They got into conversation. He was a Scotsman, he said, but he hadn't seen Scotland for nearly twenty years; and, he added somewhat bitterly, didn't care if he never saw it any more.

"It's not such a bad place, they tell me," said Haliburton J. "I am"—he hesitated—"I'm an American."

"I knew that," said the man.

"What, by my accent?"

"No," replied the man bitterly. "By the fac' you spoke to me at all."

"I made up my mind to speak to you when I saw you at the Post Office just now," the professor said lightly. "I'm very interested in

Scotsmen, if you'll allow me to say so. I believe in them firmly. They've grit for anything. It struck me just now," he went on feeling in his pocket, "that I might be able to induce you to accept——"

"A dunna want your money," cried the man.
"A'll ask charity fra' none."

"I was going to suggest a loan."

"Oh, a loan," said the man weakly.

CHAPTER VII

“**L**OOK here, Mr. Bunn, weren't you talking big talk to that broken-down white man a while ago?” asked Haliburton J. when he came back to the Post Office.

“Doing what, sah?” asked Bunn, who, with immense dignity, was making his way down the hot sunlit room.

“Don't you think you were a trifle severe in what you said?”

“But you hear what he said to me, sah? Talking about soap to me! Should I occupy my present position under honourable nose of Resident if I did not use soap daily? I tell him, sah, and I tell you, that I am a great user of soap.”

He went back to his desk fuming, and with a trembling hand continued the stamping of the letters.

“There you go. They'll never put you in

charge of this sorting again," said Haliburton J., coming to the desk and picking up an envelope. "Postmark upside down, and only an eighth of an inch of postmark on the stamp."

"Hand him here, sah. I'll postmark you, you devil," to the letter. "And now get away into the basket and don't you be taking up people's time."

"That European seems to have upset you," ventured Haliburton J., taking off his glasses and rubbing the perspiration from them for the fifteenth time that morning.

"When I get angry something's got to go," explained Bunn. "Usually it's my peaceful character."

"In this case it was the white man," pursued Haliburton J. "Who is he? What's his name?"

"His name, let me see, sah," said Bunn, scratching his head. "The common peoples call him 'Tiddley Tim,' that's his improper name, sah. I don't call him that, but I have forgot what other name I do call him."

"You called him plenty just now," pointed out Haliburton J.

"Oah, yes, sah, but those are the sort of names I call every one. I'll inquire his legal name."

He strutted importantly through the door and returned with the information that the man's name was Alexis McQuat, and that he lived in the Eurasian quarter.

"A Highlander, then?" remarked Haliburton J.

"A what, sah?" asked Bunn, looking stupid,

"A man who comes from the mountains of Scotland," translated Haliburton J.

"Oah, yes. I see. One of the natives," said Bunn understandingly. "We also have our Sakai and head hunters. Bloodthirsty devils!"

"By the way, I asked you a week or two ago," remarked Haliburton J., "whether you knew any one of the name of Campbell living here. He is, I believe, one of the richest merchants in Jallagar. He's my uncle, and I know he expects me to go and see him."

"Camel—Camel, sah," muttered Bunn. "The name strikes me familiarly. Now where have I heard that name? I'll inquire, sah."

"That's what you said a fortnight ago you'd do," said Haliburton J. reproachfully.

"I'll inquire again, sah," said Bunn, sliding off his seat and bustling away.

He came back in a minute looking very important.

"Have scrutinized our list of ratepayers and find no Camels, sah," he said. "Nearest we have got is a lady called Le Mare. She might be a sort of half-sister. I suppose she wouldn't do, would she, sah?"

"No, I'm afraid not, thanks," replied the professor.

He had inquired for his rich uncle several times on first landing in Jallagar and had found out nothing. People, indeed, seemed suspicious and resentful when he asked for information. He discovered later on that somebody had landed in Jallagar before in the hope of finding a rich uncle, and, although disappointed in his search for this relative, had managed before his sudden and unobtrusive departure to establish permanent relations with several of the old inhabitants by borrowing money from them. After this discovery, he—the professor—had as a rule restrained

the dutiful nephew in him and refrained from inquiries.

"Anything else I can do, sah?" asked the waiting Bunn.

"Nothing at present," replied Haliburton J. "Except if you can be a little more civil to that poor European I should take it as a personal favour."

"Very good, sah," promised Bunn. "It presents a difficulty."

"How's that?"

"Well, sah, when you're an official you cease to be a civilian. You ought to have studied our Mr. Kamp, sah. Before he got present job and was doing nothing, being a civilian, he was civilest person that ever came under my nose. Directly he became an official he stopped being civil."

"Oh, did he?"

"Yes, sah, and the more of an official he gets the less of a civil he becomes. In fact, sometimes he is damn rude, as most of us Eurasian officials know to our various costs."

"I'm sure Mr. Kamp wouldn't say anything rude," said the professor loyally.

"It isn't so much what he says, it's the

nasty habit he's got of kicking," explained the half-caste. "The position of office-boy here is a sinecure, I assure you. The last one hasn't been cured yet. I think this kicking of office-boys by Mr. Kamp is setting a bad example, sah, when he won't allow me to follow it. A bitter pill, sah, for man of my long service with Government that kicking office-boys is forbidden fruits and raises in more obstreperous spirits a considerable sulkiness."

"But nobody is supposed to kick any one."

"Kicking the office-boy is old tradition out East, I assure you," asseverated Bunn. "We have all of us had it. The gentleman who kicked me as office-boy was a man of tremendous energies, sah. He is now a Governor. I expect that is what my so-called superior, Mr. Kamp, is driving at. But he drives too hard at the office-boy, sah."

"So you think he wants to be Governor?"

"He talks like a Governor to those who let him," said Bunn. "As for I myself, well, sah, some peoples has a natural dignity. They command respect, and they can put down impudence with a mere snap of the forefinger. He don't try any of his games on with me, no, sah."

"Bunn!" shouted an angry voice from the inner office. "Come here!"

"Yes, sah," replied Bunn.

He looked at Haliburton J., grinning uneasily and prepared to depart.

"Bunn!" said the voice again. The glass door rattled open, and Kamp burst out and came towards them. "I shall be very glad if you will do your business without wasting de time of de clerks," he said nastily.

"I'm sorry," murmured Haliburton J., looking down his nose. "We don't waste much time, Mr. Bunn, do we?"

"You do," contradicted Kamp in an unpleasant voice. "I watched you closely for de last hour and you've done noding, both of you."

"I hope you didn't catch your eye in the keyhole," said Haliburton J. sweetly.

"Catch it in de what?" demanded the Postmaster-General. "Dere is no keyhole."

He looked angrily at the pair, and observing a grin on the face of his half-caste assistant, was about to speak, thought better of it, and retired, shutting the door behind him.

He spent the remainder of that day behind

that closed door, considering apparently how he could possibly have caught his eye in the keyhole of it. When he came out towards evening he was, so it seemed, in a highly insulted condition. He instructed Bunn never to try and curry favour with him again by saying good night, and passed the professor's desk at the double, snorting fiercely.

The professor, at the window, watched him descend the wooden steps, watched his passionate refusal of a small fan that his native coachman, who seemed to think he needed it, offered to him, watched the buggy drive away.

Then he, too, put on his topee and took the road for home.

The day marked the end of his month in Jallagar, a month in which he had accumulated experiences sufficient to last him for several years. He felt that because of the dislike his immediate superior had taken to him, a dislike which that gentleman missed no opportunity of underlining, the next few weeks, too, would not be devoid of interest.

The road which led to the hill where most of the Europeans lived ran for about a mile

through a plain of old coco-nut plantations. The amber light from the setting sun still poured down on it; but underneath the palms was already twilight. Yellow wood smoke, ascending from the roofs of the reed-built huts that dotted the roadside, showed that evening rice-pots were on the fire. Small family groups of blue-clad country natives, standing about the footways, lined up and made way for him to pass, saluting respectfully and bidding him good evening. They stared as he raised his topee, and, noticing this, he decided to get out of the habit of doing so.

At the foot of the hill he came across friends, or rather one friend, Miss Vannery. The other was a stoutish lady whom he had not met before. Melita introduced her as Mrs. Bobby, wife of the Superintendent of the Public Works Department.

"We all have our labels," remarked the lady, smiling.

"I only said who you were to prevent Professor Bliss from getting mixed," said Melita.

"I do get mixed, you know," confessed Haliburton J.

"But just now we're not only mixed," said Melita. "We're absolutely pickled."

"Why—why?" murmured the professor

"You see these bicycles," said the stout lady, pointing tragically.

Haliburton J. adjusted his eyeglasses, and looking along the lady's finger saw lying in the grass, near the hedge, two machines.

"Why, one of them's broken!" he exclaimed.

"There, I thought you'd notice it," cried Melita. "Professor Bliss is a trained observer, Milly; mathematics and political economy; and we can rely on what he says. The bicycle is indeed broken, just as we thought. It's lucky you found us, professor."

"Is any one hurt?" asked the trained observer.

"Now we have reasoning from cause to effect—the professor will proceed to examine your ankle, Milly."

"No, he won't," remarked Mrs. Bobby firmly.

"Oh," said Melita. "Now please tell me, Milly, are you a hospital nurse? No? Very well. Have you an ambulance certificate?"

The stout lady shook her head.

"Well, I have ; so you must do as you're told. That's the first thing a patient has to do. Any nurse will tell you that. Professor Bliss, examine the ankle at once."

Haliburton J., stooping in the uncertain light, peered through his eyeglasses at the stout white-clad foot that the lady thrust forward. He touched it gingerly.

"Does it hurt there ?"

"No—no— Oh, that's very tender !"

"I should say it is sprained," pronounced Haliburton J. With an air of having accomplished an embarrassing task, he stood erect.

"Not broken?" inquired Mrs. Bobby in a disappointed voice.

"No, I think not."

"Then I shan't be able to go to Pelung to get it seen to. I never do have any luck."

"Don't be ungrateful, Milly," said Melita comfortingly. "Why, it might have been your nose !"

"Whoever heard of a sprained nose?" exclaimed Mrs. Bobby.

"I've heard of one being out of joint, though," said Melita. "And now the problem is, how are

we to get you home? What do you think, Professor Bliss?"

"If we had an aeroplane—" began Haliburton J., after a moment's deep thought.

"Come now," said Melita, "that's something."

"Or if I was an angel," said Mrs. Bobby.

"You are," affirmed Melita. "But you mustn't fly home. Mr. Bobby would cut down your taxi money at once. I've an idea, not so poetical as yours perhaps, but much safer."

"Good!" said Haliburton J. "What is it?"

"You lift her on my bicycle and wheel her home."

"But what about you?" asked Haliburton J., who had not expected such a solution.

"I shall be all right," said Melita gaily. "I shall walk home. It's not far."

The professor, it seemed, had his doubts. He did not like the look of the night. As for the natives, they were in his opinion not to be trusted. A better plan he thought would be to wait till a cart came by.

The difficulty was solved by Mrs. Bobby who declared firmly that she would not be wheeled an inch except in the company of Miss Vannery.

It was dark when the task of getting the sufferer comfortably seated on the bicycle was completed and they set out. Melita, carrying a bicycle lamp, kept up a cheerful flow of conversation, to which the professor, his energies bent on his task, responded but feebly. He was engaged on a task of undreamt of difficulty. Had he been granted by the gods the privilege of choosing another irritating labour for Hercules, he would have selected unhesitatingly that of wheeling a stout woman up a steep hill on a safety bicycle in a tropical climate.

He was a man rather proud of the fact that he perspired freely, but he had never realized until now what he could do in that direction when he really tried.

To Miss Vannery's gay inquiry, half-way up the hill, concerning his well-being, he responded with a mutter that sounded to the others very like a grunt.

She repeated the question.

"I said I feel like an iceberg trapped in hell," he responded despondently.

"Do you?" said Melita. "Is that pleasant or otherwise?"

"Anything with ice sounds pleasing," cooed Mrs. Bobby. "If it weren't for my unfortunate ankle and the way this front wheel wobbles, I should really enjoy this ride."

"I'll try and keep it from wobbling," Melita said, and grasped the handle on the other side.

She must have realized that Haliburton J. had a very heavy task, and pushed a little also, for after that the bicycle, it appeared to him, travelled far more easily. Indeed, the handle bar appeared to have acquired properties, so astonishing and mysteriously inspiring, that when the party reached the hill-top scarcely any pushing at all was required, so it seemed to him.

On the Bobbys' veranda, the patient's husband, a small man who, as his wife remarked without delay, would have made a fortune as a West End physician, prescribed iced champagne to be taken by everybody at once.

The ankle in spite of this treatment remained sickly looking.

"It will lay you up for a week, I'm afraid," said Mr. Bobby, after inspecting it by the light of a hurricane lamp.

Mrs. Bobby, reclining gracefully in a long chair, said that she wouldn't mind.

"We shan't be able to play to-morrow, that's all," pointed out her husband.

"I hadn't thought of that," remarked Melita. "Then I suppose it will be a walk over for us. I'm sorry. It's the tournament, you know, professor."

"Perhaps they'll let a substitute play for you," suggested Mr. Bobby in a not too hopeful voice.

"I don't think Mr. Kamp would," returned Melita, rather scornfully. "He wants to win, I'm certain."

"If we chose somebody sufficiently bad at the game, he might," suggested Mrs. Bobby. "Do you play, Professor Bliss?"

"I've tried once or twice, but I've no great gift," Haliburton J. replied modestly.

"I find being short-sighted interferes with my game," said the lady. "I suppose you find the same?"

The professor nodded.

"Funny how fair, fresh-complexioned people suffer from short sight," ruminated Mrs. Bobby. "Kamp is the same. I wonder sometimes how he ever sees the ball. But he manages to."

Melita looked casually at the two martyrs from short sight. In the lamp-light their faces bore a strong resemblance. Their figures, too—no compliment to Mrs. Bobby—might pass for those of twins at a pinch, or rather provided that of the professor were pinched in at the waist. “And,” reflected Melita, “they are much the same height.”

She looked at them again, so intently that they both became conscious of her gaze.

Mrs. Bobby put up her hand to her hair.

“No, it’s nothing,” said Melita. “I was only wondering, that’s all.”

“Wondering what?” inquired Mrs. Bobby politely.

“You and Professor Bliss are so very much alike in looks.”

Haliburton J. glanced at the stout lady and decided at once that she was not his long-lost Uncle Campbell.

“Are we alike?” inquired Mrs. Bobby, smiling at him.

“You are, strikingly, now Melita points it out,” exclaimed her husband.

“I’ve an idea,” cried Melita in a moment.

"Yes, you must play in the tournament tomorrow, Professor Bliss. You must! It's a splendid idea!"

"I shall be glad to play," said Haliburton J.

"And you'll take him for a partner, Mr. Bobby?"

"Certainly," said the Superintendent of the Public Works Department.

"And you'll lend him your tennis dress and shoes and everything, Milly?"

"What for?" demanded husband and wife together.

The professor said nothing, but grew rather pale.

"What for? Why, of course, because I intend to dress him up to look like you, Milly. He shall play against me as you, and nobody will detect the difference. Don't say it's impossible!"

As, after the first gasp of astonishment, neither Mr. nor Mrs. Bobby raised any serious objection, and indeed appeared to think that for an American professor of sporting instincts to dress up as a lady and play in a tennis tournament against his only enemy was just what one would expect,

Haliburton fell in with the proposal, looking as pleasant as possible.

"I wonder what Adolphus will say when he finds out?" laughed Mr. Bobby.

The professor wondered also, and grew paler than ever.

Presently he and Melita were sauntering back to the Residency. Their way was through the warm darkness where palms formed silhouettes against a pale sky, where night-jars hovered, past dimly outlined, many-gabled bungalows. The pair talked but little, not because there was little to say, but because, though they did not know it, the night was saying it for them.

It was only after he had left her at the Residency gate and was walking slowly home that the professor became aware of the fact that, in spite of all his exertions, he was feeling more than usually young and happy.

He put it down to the iced champagne.

CHAPTER VIII

FRIDAY, hated by all fish and sacred wherever Mussulmans forgather, is—in its afternoon at any rate—devoted by the Europeans at Jallagar to the pursuit of sport.

In the East, wherever Englishmen have lived safe enough and long enough to rear daughters, will be found finely-tended lawns on which, when the sun begins to sink, the stars of the settlement form a constellation and endeavour to eclipse each other in the playing of games with various sizes and shapes of ball.

The lawn outside the Kuching Astana, famous throughout the Asia that counts, is not a whit better than that which lies like a long green drugget in front of the fantastic, many-pinnacled Residency of Jallagar.

In this shaded emerald aisle between the noble acacia-trees, where in the 'forties the native wife

of the first Resident practised archery clad in her Dyak costume of little or nothing, to the dismay of all ladies who used telescopes, was now stretched a single tennis net. It was a brand new net with a solid white forehead, yellow legs, and the appearance of tightness which in the case of tennis nets always marches with respectability. The white markings on the court about it were greasily fresh, the grass, like a debutante, well trained but as yet unworn.

Space was given at the Residency to other games at other times; but to-day clock golf looked dishevelled and forlorn, whilst the bowls which usually monopolized the farther end of the lawn were huddled in a corner sulkily. All was still. Under the overpowering heat and shimmer of the fierce sun, the whole vast garden and the straggling bungalow beside it lay absolutely quiet.

The bungalow was the first to awake. There was the sound of a light footstep along a corridor. Melita, in a white drill tennis frock, appeared in the flower-hung portico, looked impatiently at her wrist watch, then down the shaded drive. She brought a deck-chair and sat down. Presently, almost stealthily, there appeared, walking very

fast and carrying a bag, Professor Haliburton J. Bliss.

“Hush !” said Melita when he came up.

How the stairs and corridors of the Residency creaked ! Every Chinese servant seemed to have multiplied himself by three. The eyes of them all had stalks.

Another deserted garden under the vehement sun.

Five minutes later Mr. Bobby came into sight, walking slowly up the avenue and holding himself with not quite his usual erectness. A thoughtful air that ill accorded with his white flannels and gay straw hat was visible upon his rubicund face. He strolled on to the court swinging his clamped racquet, felt the net, examined the turf with a gloomy air.

In this occupation he was presently joined by the Resident and Adolphus Kamp. From their conversation one gathered that the Resident, although never a tennis player, knew most about the game of the three of them. Like many experts, he was a confirmed pessimist, the players of that day being as naught in his opinion compared with those of his youth. Women players,

he admitted, had reached a higher standard, but had reached it by the unfair means of discarding their womanliness and adopting flat feet. A remark by Mr. Bobby, that he would rather adopt a pair of flat feet than an early Victorian fat head, being coldly received and indeed stigmatized by both listeners as in bad taste, that gentleman in some dudgeon sought a comforter in the person of his understudy, the Assistant P.W.D., borrowed a cigarette, lit it and, his red moustache drooping, stared at the entrance of the house where several ladies, in dazzling white with sunshades aloft, had settled in a row of chairs. He perceived that the Chinese boys were handing round refreshments and, advancing to render aid if required, managed to save the last glass on the tray.

By this time most of the other men had also rescued glasses. They handed each other the Residency cigarettes. Mr. Vannery passed in and out amongst them. He had a stiff but friendly greeting for all.

The garden was no longer a place of silences. There was a rustling of petticoats, a clinking of ice in glass, a fluttering of scarves and fans, a bird-like conversation, cheeping at first and then,

as the minutes wore on and the dissipated smoke of Turkish cigarettes filled the air, growing fully fledged.

A Chinese boy in white came out from the Residency with a strut and scattered a dozen new balls over the grass. Another placed wooden steps by the net for the umpire.

People hastily brought chairs and put them in good positions on the side of the court reserved for spectators. The Chinese attendant, to their surprise, made them move their chairs farther back than was customary from the edge of the court.

They sat in them thrilled with expectancy. A girl in pale blue, expensively millinered, was heard to offer a wager of a new hat that Mr. Kamp and the Resident's daughter would win. There were no takers. The Swede, contrary to his usual custom, was evidently a strong favourite.

The girl remarked to a young man at her side that he had no enterprise.

He grinned feebly.

"I say," he said, "do you think Miss Van-
nery will marry Kamp if he pulls it off?"

The lady in blue shrugged her shoulders.

"Would you marry him?" she asked.

"No, but suppose I was forced into it?"

"I don't think it's as bad as that," murmured the young lady. "Melita can look after herself."

"But Kamp is a terrible fellow! Look at him!"

The fat Swede, divested of jacket and sweater, was now walking proudly up and down the centre of the court, his sleeves rolled up, his tennis spectacles firmly tied on. He glared through them at the spectators, who looked at him with some aversion.

When Mr. Bobby, similarly attired, appeared at the other end of the court there was slight applause.

"Where are the two ladies?" asked the youth of the girl in blue.

"They're indoors changing," she replied, with the smile of the well-informed person. "Mr. Vannery has gone to fetch them."

"They'd better hurry up then," muttered the youth irreverently. "Old Kamp's getting heated. Look at him swiping away at an imaginary daisy. By Jove, I wouldn't be that chap's cook for something, would you?"

"I'll be no man's cook," said the young lady

in blue decisively. "Besides, he hasn't one at the moment. But look at Mr. Bobby. I'm sure there's something the matter with him. He keeps staring up at the house as if he expected it to pounce on him and eat him. And he keeps looking on the ground and shaking his head."

"That's nerves. That means he's going to be whopped," the youth informed her. "Have you ever read the life of J. L. Sullivan? No? Oh, I say, haven't you? Well, that's how most people looked when they found themselves in the ring with him."

A round of applause marked the appearance of the Resident. He walked rapidly from the house to the tennis court. The two lady competitors followed. They joined their partners.

The game began.

Although Jallagar Residency faces towards the east, the sun at a certain period of some afternoons takes up an aggravating position in the sky, and, with the aid of the small lake on the other side of the tennis lawn, manages to bedazzle spectators of the Residency tournaments, and sometimes the players themselves.

To the onlookers the first sett of the game

went much as was expected. They knew Mr. Bobby was the best player in Jallagar and that his wife was nearly the worst, and they were not at all surprised when they found that all the brilliancy of the husband was rendered useless by the utter feebleness of the wife.

"She's playing worse than ever," remarked the sallow youth. "Why will she wear those spectacles and that poke bonnet?"

"To save her eyes, I suppose," said the young lady in blue. "I do wish I had an ice."

"Are there any?" asked the youth, rising with alacrity.

"No, or I'd have sent you before."

"I do hate that chap, Kamp," said the youth. "There's not a bit of sport in him. Just look how he's returning every ball hard at Mrs. Bobby. Just as I thought—they've won the sett. Six—love."

He tilted his topee over his nose and moodily watched the competitors change ends.

The second sett began, and the game went much like the first. Kamp, flushed with success, was banging the ball at Mrs. Bobby harder than ever.

After a time the young man closed his eyes to the painful sight.

He had been through what was for Jallagar a tiring morning. It was pleasant sometimes to shut one's eyes and let the sunlight filter through the lids. He wondered where the Resident bought his whisky. Imported by the cask, he had heard, and bottled——

"Oh, did you see that?" said the young girl in blue, clutching his arm.

"No," he gasped, sitting upright. "What was it?"

"Why," said the girl in low, excited tones. "Kamp hit Mrs. Bobby once with the ball as hard as he could. Then he tried it again, and somehow she shifted her racquet over quickly to the other hand and returned the ball like lightning. Look at her, she seems quite different. Oh, isn't she playing well?"

The fat Swede had returned another service of Mr. Bobby's to her with the same result. He looked puzzled.

"What's the score?" asked the youth.

"Love—five," returned the girl in blue, "and deuce. That's vantage to the Bobbys. Good biz!"

“And that’s game,” remarked the youth in a moment, his lethargy gone. “By Jove, she’s waking up !”

The girl looked round at her friends, the other spectators, and saw that they, too, were sitting erect in their chairs and staring before them with an expectant air. On the court Kamp had drawn Melita aside, and with forefinger uplifted was talking earnestly. From his heavy-father attitude it was plain that he considered she should be blamed for the loss of the game, and expected her to try and do better next time.

Their opponents waited patiently for the end of a solo that, owing to Miss Vannery’s efforts, had become a duet, and were the only persons present who did not join in the round of applause which burst forth when the partners separated.

It was Mrs. Bobby’s turn to serve. The fat Swede, having assured himself by several glances that Melita was in the exact position necessary for him to win the stroke, took his place close to the middle line, and assumed an attitude calculated to kill any service even before delivery.

To his obviously intense surprise his contemptible opponent, instead of delivering something utterly feeble with a spoon, threw the ball up in the air, caught it with a swing of the racquet, which every one realized was perfect, and sent it whizzing over the net at about twice the speed of a respectable express. It hit the ground, broke off between the widely-extended legs of the unbeatable Adolphus at the very moment when he was in the act of punishing the air about three feet away.

The spectators applauded wildly.

The fat Swede, firmly convinced that he had been cheated in some manner, looked round for the culprit. He found it in a small lump of dirt left by a worm. The worm, fortunately for itself, was an absentee, but the lump Adolphus proceeded to demolish with his heel. This task done, he waved his racquet confidently at the spectators and proceeded to the task of permitting Miss Vannery to take the next service.

It was an easy-looking delivery, coming through the air like a settling dove, and Adolphus was possibly quite within his rights in at once concluding that it ought to have been returned

without difficulty. But the spectators noticed that even when invited to do so by Melita he declined to come over to her side of the court and inspect it for lumps also. Instead, he scowled, and with an air of disgust and disappointment strode well beyond the back line, where he bent till his glasses were on a level with the net top, groped with hand and racquet to see that nothing was in the way, and stood ominously still, ready to receive any service, even though delivered from the cannon's mouth.

But Mrs. Bobby, after a great leap forward and the beginning of a mighty stroke tipped the ball with the edge of her racquet in a way that made the service look like an accident. And yet another gentle dove alighted six inches beyond the right side of the net and hopped away at right angles.

"That makes forty—love," said the youth to the girl in blue with a well-satisfied air. "I wonder what he'll blame for that? Ah, he has discovered another lump in the ground."

It was not a lump this time; it was a small piece of stick which Adolphus held up to the view of the spectators. Many things have been

thrown away in disgust, but none have been worse treated in this respect than was that piece of stick.

A muffing of the next service by his partner cost their side the game. The next three games were of the nature of duels between an excited and perspiring Adolphus and an extraordinarily active Mrs. Bobby, rendered monotonous only by the fact that while the former invariably placed the ball where his opponent was ready to receive it, the lady with equal consistency placed it in the most inaccessible corner of the court.

These three games went to the Bobbys.

"That makes five all," said the young man to the girl in blue. "If you like I'll take you on about that hat. I want a new hat."

"You won't get it from me," laughed the girl.

"It looks a safe thing for the P.W.D.," said the young man, "although of course Adolphus may get his second wind."

"Everybody would be sorry if he did. How rude he was to Melita! He as good as pushed her off the court in the last game. Oh, I say! Look at him!"

A Chinese boy bearing a solitary half-lemon on a white plate pushed his way through the ring of spectators and hurried across the lawn. The fat Swede strode to the centre of the court, seized the lemon and sucked it greedily. A slight attempt at applause when he pitched it away and bent down to resume the match was at once put an end to by Mr. Vannery, who occupied a seat next to the umpire.

It was now again Mrs. Bobby's turn to serve, and apparently the intention of that lady to discard guile and play a forcing game. Melita received a service that was out of reach of any wingless angel. Both of those supplied to Adolphus reached him amid general cheering, the first in the pit of the stomach, the second on the point of the nose.

It was the latter which caused him, amid great excitement, to throw his racquet into the net and his topee after it. He then proceeded to swear at the sun for getting into his eyes, and announced that he and his partner had given up the match.

"I don't know what he's blaming the sun for," remarked the girl in blue. "I s'pose it's

because it's too far away to answer back. Well, I'm going over to congratulate Mrs. Bobby." She rose and walked across the lawn.

But in the general excitement Mrs. Bobby and Melita had disappeared.

CHAPTER IX

IN every well-arranged bungalow is a place where coolness has its headquarters, where fruit keeps best, and the wise Chinese boy hangs the water-bottle. The architect of Jallagar Residency showed a touch of genius when he constructed at this domestic North Pole a small sitting-room above and an office on the tiled ground floor below.

The office contained the telephone. The sitting-room was Melita's, open only to intimate friends. It took, as a rule, months of siege before even a woman penetrated there, and although he did not know it, Professor Haliburton J. Bliss was one of the only three men who had so far entered. To achieve this height of favour had taken him little more than a month.

He sat with the Mrs.-Bobby bonnet on the table beside him, and the Mrs.-Bobby skirt hitched over his knees, showing white trousers

now turned down. The breeze coming in at the wide window blew about his thin hair. He was clinging to a cigarette with an appearance of being outwardly calm only.

"I never knew skirts were such hot things," he remarked, keeping up this appearance. "I'm glad I don't have to wear them."

"That's something fresh you've learned to-day," returned Melita in an eager voice from her seat on the couch. "We all have found out lots of things to-day."

"You have?"

"Whoever dreamt of your being such a tennis-player!" she went on quickly. "Oh, it's splendid! I've told you that already, but I must say it again!"

"We had some much better men than me at college."

"That's not what I mean. What matters is that I thought you couldn't do things, couldn't play games. I have been looking at you from the wrong angle."

Her wide-open eyes and excited face seemed to say that from the new angle the view was better.

"You haven't any idea, yourself, of how glad

"I am we won," she went on rapidly, bending towards him with an unconscious air of flattery that set him quivering.

"You can't be any gladder than I am," he remarked briefly.

There were depths here, pleasant, but unfamiliar. He applied the cigarette to his lips. It refused to draw.

"Yes, I am a thousand times."

"I only wish Adolphus Kamp knew who had beaten him," he remarked, shooting quick, nervous glances at her.

"He mustn't know that. If he did he'd want to play again."

It occurred to the professor that what the fat Adolphus wanted mattered more than it ought to do. This man was getting altogether too much! He ought to be hounded from the island. Bullying her, perhaps,—her! Any decent man would get excited.

"Let him," he said shortly and indignantly.

He toyed with the cigarette unconsciously, as a drowning man might with a straw.

"No, no. He mustn't play again!" exclaimed Melita. "You don't quite understand.

I must tell you. It's so difficult. My father——
You don't—I——”

She stopped speaking suddenly.

Her face was half turned away from him. Her breast was heaving. The hand dangling near him at her side was tightly clenched.

A sight like this was, of course, impossible mathematically, the picture lopsided and unnatural. Some force beyond the control of political economy urged the professor to remedy it. He found himself, before he knew, on his knees beside her, clasping her hand, talking rapidly and vehemently and with an inexactitude of which a scientifically trained person like himself should have been incapable.

He was quite sure that she did not understand what he was saying ; he hardly did himself. But she did not draw away her hand—that was at least encouraging ; and when he had become awake again he knew exactly what he wanted to say.

He said :

“Marry me.”

“How can I ?” she asked intensely.

“Why not ?”

"I can't marry until my father has a male tortoise-shell cat. I made up my mind long ago."

A male tortoise-shell cat! Absurdity!

"My dear Miss Vannery—Melita," urged the professor, still on his knees. "What you ask is a scientific impossibility. Don't drive me beyond the boundaries of reason. I have been reading a book on mendelism lately. If you read it too you would be convinced with me that——"

"Can't you see my father will go mad if he doesn't get one?" she said in an agitated way. "Try to get one! Try to, if you care for me! Don't come to me without!"

"But——" began the professor.

A step sounded in the corridor outside. She sprang up, snatched away her hand and banged to the door. She turned the key and stood listening.

"He's gone away," she whispered at last. "But I'm certain he saw you. He couldn't help it."

"Who was it? Kamp?" asked the professor in a hoarse whisper.

"Yes. Now you must go away quickly. If he finds a trick has been played on him he will worry and bully my father."

"I'll stay," said the professor, looking defiantly at the door.

"You must leave at once. It would cause great trouble if you were found here."

"But how?" asked the professor. "Perhaps he's waiting outside the door to see who it was with you."

"Drop through the window on to the ground before he has time to make a search," said Melita in an excited whisper. "Run into the coco-nut plantation and hurry back to your office. He's nearly sure to ring you up."

"Good-bye," said Haliburton J. with decision, going to the window.

She saw him crawl through, heard him drop with a loud crash to the ground, paused again at the door, and after listening unlocked and swung it open. The corridor was empty.

She crept out and went on tiptoe downstairs to the office.

Outside on the lawn Mr. Vannery was still engaged on the task of speeding the parting guest.

He was well aware, having been told so at least twenty times within the last ten minutes, that his friend and *protégé*, Mr. Adolphus Kamp, wished a word in private with him. But he also had a vivid recollection of an occasion when his neglect to be commonly polite and see the last visitor off the premises had caused him the loss of a silver cigarette-box and two dozen spoons. On that day he had vowed to the gods Ptah and Ra that no person should ever leave his premises after an entertainment without being seen off them. His adhesion to that vow was adamantine.

Melita, knowing that sooner or later she would find her father in the smoking-room, paid a visit there, and found him with the head boy putting away the silver. Her second attempt was luckier.

"I say again that it's impossible," Mr. Vannery was declaring to Adolphus in heated tones. "You must have been seeing visions."

Kamp retorted with a one-syllabled word which might have been Egyptian, but which sounded remarkably like "rot."

Melita, standing outside the door about to enter, winced.

"I have not the slightest doubt you were deceived," went on Mr. Vannery warmly. "In fact, I should say it is a very interesting instance of auto-suggestion. You have Mrs. Bobby playing tennis better than you. She beats you, and you would naturally rather be beaten by a man than a woman. You therefore at once suggest to yourself that she is a man. You come indoors and seek liquid refreshment. Looking in casually at the small sitting-room, a room which I may point out is haunted by the ghost of my predecessor's black Persian cat and therefore not entirely to be trusted, you see a woman wearing in part male attire kneeling by my daughter and clasping her hand. At the sight of you my daughter rises and shuts the door in your face. You state that the woman in trousers was Professor Bliss, whom you left at the Post Office with enough work to keep him busy until evening.

"Come now, I will demolish your argument. Suppose there was a woman dressed partly in male attire. She might very well have been an Egyptian goddess. Some of these wore such clothes. Or again, the person might be Mrs.

Bobby and the attire capable of another explanation. Have you forgotten that Professor Bliss landed in Jallagar wearing a pair of magic trousers brought from Memphis and under the protection of Ptah and Ra? You can't have forgotten them. I for one have had them continually in my mind's eye. I often see them. You did to-day. What probably happened was this: you saw Mrs. Bobby with your ordinary eye; the attire you saw with your mind's eye. The latter sight was projected on to the former. The explanation is perfectly simple. Ah, here's Melita."

"I've come to apologize to you, Mr. Kamp," said Miss Vannery, coldly, declining a chair. "I shut the door in your face a moment ago. You know, father, how interested I am in palmistry and magic, Egyptian magic especially?"

Mr. Vannery nodded.

"I was just having my fortune told," explained Miss Vannery. "I knew that Mr. Kamp's entrance would disturb the psychic influence, and I simply had to be rude. Ah, mine's a most delightful fortune!"

"There, Kamp," said Mr. Vannery, triumphantly. "Kamp had some silly idea, Melita,

that Mrs. Bobby was Professor Bliss ; and he had a vision of er—trousers.”

“What a funny vision !” laughed Melita. “But hasn’t Professor Bliss been at the office all the afternoon ?”

“Yes, that is the best part of the joke,” said the Resident. “However, if he wishes, Kamp can easily prove that he is wrong by ringing the professor up.”

“I will do so,” cried Adolphus, struck with the idea.

He left the room and ran noisily downstairs. A few moments later he came running back.

“Der telephone is wrong,” he cried, looking at them suspiciously. “Some one plays tricks with me—with it. All the wires are torn and smashed.”

“Wrong ?” exclaimed Mr. Vannery, jumping up. “Ah, yes, you mean broken. Dear me ! Now, isn’t that funny ? We certainly must be under the influence of some evil spirit. First, the cat eats her kittens ; then, you are beaten at tennis ; and now the telephone is smashed by unseen hands. Very strange and very terrible ! Dear me !”

Adolphus glared from one to the other.

"Stuff and nonsense!" he roared suddenly.

He rushed from the room.

The Resident looked after him in alarm.

"It seems to me," he said to his daughter, "that Kamp is getting rather eccentric nowadays. He always was a volcano of energy, but for the last fortnight he has been in a state of constant eruption. Dear me, Melita, you've cut your hand quite badly. It's bleeding."

"Only a very slight cut," said Miss Vannery.

"I'll tie it up with my handkerchief."

CHAPTER X

PROFESSOR BLISS emerged from the pile of broken flower-pots into which he had alighted, and, refraining from gratifying a natural desire to turn and contemplate the damage done, jumped the open drain that surrounded the Residency and forced his way through the hedge of dwarf bamboo into the coco-nut grove.

The sun was now well down the sky, and under the palms it was dark enough to make him wish to know the time. But his watch reposed in his jacket pocket, and that lay in one of the upper bedrooms of the Residency, along, now he came to think of it, with his pocket-book and all the cash he was likely to lay hands on for a fortnight.

A peep through the hedge at the dozen bedroom windows facing him, none of which he recognized, strangled at birth a wild idea of going

back to fetch his property. With a sigh he adjusted his spectacles, put on Mrs. Bobby's bonnet, lifted her skirts to a height that caused a surprised dog to bark itself almost into a fit, and set his face resolutely towards home.

The smart pace at which he stepped forward continued through the grove. When he reached open country he at once increased his pace to the double at the instance of an irate buffalo who had never seen such a combination of European clothes before, and apparently intended if possible never to see it again. The line of country chosen for the hunt gave the Professor a new idea of the thoroughness of the system of irrigation in Jallagar. The ditches, however—he counted over fifty—wanted modifying in design, being too wide to jump, and, with a mad buffalo behind, at the same time much too narrow.

He lost Mrs. Bobby's dress at the fifty-first, and from the top of a small tree watched with interest his pursuer leap in and give it the *coup-de-grâce*. It took the irate animal nearly half an hour to break every bone of his enemy's bodice. At last justice was done, the victor parted with a snort and a twirl of his tasselled tail; and

Halliburton J. cautiously slid down from his tree and, in a state of astonishment at the scarcity of back ways in the island, crept quietly home.

He was surprised to find on entering that his missing clothes had arrived before him. A neat newspaper parcel done up with red tape and sealing wax lay on the bed. The Chinese cook on inquiry stated that the female who sold eggs to him, the *Tuan*, had brought it and had gone away saying there was no answer. In continuation he said that the holes enabling the contents of the parcel to be inspected were probably torn by a rat of almost human intelligence which mistook the solar topee for a cheese.

Although it was then nearly seven o'clock Haliburton J. went back to the Post Office for the evening. In the morning he was glad he had done so, for his action enabled him to spin some sort of a tale about his doings when questioned by the Postmaster-General.

Adolphus had arrived early, the prey of suspicions which a night's thought had, it seemed, only served to sharpen. But he was thoroughly unpopular with every clerk in the Post Office, and the accounts he received from them of the

professor's comings and goings during the previous day would have, if all were true, been sufficient to hang that gentleman for wizardry.

But, as time went on and the Chinese boys talked in the bazaar, rumours concerning the sex of the tennis player spread through the town. A dress with the name of Bobby sewn on it had been pawned by a Malay in the Chinese quarter. Somebody had seen a white form, half man half "mem," walking through the plantations at the back of the Residency. The Swede's suspicions were confirmed, and he took measures accordingly.

Haliburton J. now found in a thousand ways what an uncomfortable place Jallagar Post Office could be to work in, and began to experience a pressing desire for a transfer to another department as far away from it as possible.

His wish was quickly gratified. Within a week the position of Controller of Dog Licences became vacant. Much to his surprise and owing, so whispered the envious, to unfair influence at headquarters, he received the appointment, which included the use of a room with a punkah at the back of the Post Office, a telephone, and an office-boy.

Bunn, the Second Assistant Postmaster-General, was less fortunate. He was well known to Adolphus as a backer and friend of the American, and after the latter's removal he had to bear the brunt of a resentment unable to vent itself elsewhere.

A watch seems to have been kept on him. The Government Auditors, with their usual spirit of petty malice, had returned a voucher of his, saying that "39 cents" should read "93 cents." In a moment of irritation he sent back the voucher with the remark "Please read backwards" scrawled across it. Kamp brought the matter before the Resident, and Bunn was dismissed the service.

He called at the bungalow on the evening after his dismissal and announced to Haliburton J. that he didn't care if it snowed. Asked what he proposed to do next, he said he intended to open a new Post Office on the island in competition with the Government, and that in order to do so he was taking the next steamer to Pelung to buy there cheap a stock of postage stamps.

When the professor with great difficulty had made him understand that what he proposed to

do was against the law, he said he was going to Pelung anyway. His passage was booked, 2nd class. He was willing, he said, to undertake any commission with which Professor Bliss might honour him.

"There's nothing I want," said Haliburton J. listlessly. "There is one thing, of course, but I don't suppose you could get that."

"Get anything, sah, and bring it back in the cabin," Bunn assured him. "Hope you won't ask me to bring Bombay duck or Gorgonzola cheese, sah."

"What I want," said Haliburton J. impressively, sitting forward in his chair and playing with his eyeglasses, "is a thing you will find impossible to get, a tortoise-shell cat."

"Get plenty of tortoise-shell cats," stated Bunn, as though he owned a mint of them.

"Ah, yes," returned the professor sorrowfully. "But I want an impossibility. I want a male tortoise-shell."

"That's an entirely different coco-nut, sah," said Bunn. "Males difficult to get. Only get them in Tiak. The Sultan of Tiak, he's got plenty. I know it from my widowed aunt, who

lives in his palace, occupying the responsible position of cats'-meat taster to His Highness."

"If I could get a male tortoise-shell cat coloured red, black, and fawn," said Haliburton eagerly, "I should be the happiest man alive."

"I might go and stay with my aunt, sah," suggested Bunn. "The only obstacle is that she is a member of the Sultan's harem, and they don't encourage male visitors. Whether they classify nephew as male visitor or family party I am unable to state, but if I can come under the latter I may be able to lodge myself at the harem. A happy thought, sah, is it not?"

"Just about your happiest," agreed the professor.

He said good-bye to the half-caste at the garden gate, regardless of the effect such an action might have on Jallagar society.

The steamer sailed at daylight next morning, so he had no further opportunity of ascertaining whether his attempt to obtain a male tortoise-shell from Tiak was likely to bear fruit. The fact that Bunn was said to have been seen to arrive on board carrying an empty parrot cage was an encouraging point; but the professor, as

a scientist, had but a faint belief in the possibility of a male tortoise-shell, and as the days flew by, and no news came, he dismissed the matter from his mind.

The business of the department of which he was now chief, including as it did a census of the dogs on the island and the destruction of all those that were not lucky enough to possess collars with the Government tab, absorbed his working hours. His evenings were spent in tepid recreations at which he sometimes saw, but never, to his surprise at first, could obtain a private word with a smiling and strictly non-committal Melita.

The fact that she avoided him he put down to the influence of Kamp and her father. He began to understand also that without a male tortoise-shell cat it was useless to approach her. In moments of depression he imagined that she had been kind to him for purposes of her own. But he never thought that when he looked at her.

In the town, black faces which during the first week or so had all seemed to him as alike as Dutch dolls were now beginning to possess individuality, and the human landmarks in the street were becoming familiar.

He saw the Scotsman, McQuat, more than once. The poor fellow was getting seedier every day and, he noticed, seemed to be only anxious to slink out of the way of the other white people.

CHAPTER XI

THE first few weeks of the professor's sojourn in Jallagar were among the driest McQuat ever remembered. Having formed a habit of borrowing from his acquaintances and forgetting to pay them back, he had few friends. Most of these, judging from their conduct, now nourished an ambition to make him a teetotaller. The remainder, try as he would, he never seemed to run across. Reversing the maxim of the farmers, he ascribed the memorable drought to his ill-luck.

Work and he had never been on more than nodding terms, and since the day when in a bitter moment he had told the Second Assistant-Postmaster-General what to do in order to be clean, the hard-faced lady had completely turned her back on him.

After a few interviews, brief and to the point, with the five or six employers of labour in

Jallagar, he decided with no reluctance to retire from the field of regular labour in favour of younger and less experienced men, and to earn a living by stooping to pick it up.

He was the more able to do so, as Mrs. Vanderpump at this time extended her egg business. A pamphlet detailing the advantages of a new intensive system of poultry culture, in which hens did physical drill whilst scratching for food, had reached her from Pelung ; and McQuat was now realizing how extremely handy about the house a man can be when he has to.

He was never one who minded doing an odd job provided it was odd enough ; but since Mrs. Vanderpump read that pamphlet jobs came along with an evenness that was nothing less than monotonous. Nobody with any regard to truth could call making two hen-coops a week for a month merely odd-jobbing, and had any ordinary employer ventured to suggest such a speed of labour McQuat would at once have labelled him a tyrant, and personally gummed on the label.

But where his next-door neighbour was concerned he never measured output ; and though he would at any time have shed his blood rather

than his perspiration, he shed the latter cheerfully enough for her.

It was an interesting experience for Mrs. Vanderpump to observe how much healthier both hens and handy man became through working for their living without knowing it.

But whilst the plumage of the feathered bipeds grew constantly more brilliant and their wattles redder than ever, the healthier McQuat, the dingier he became in dress and colour of nose. Indeed, the last-mentioned organ became after a time so pale and shrunken that the widow one day enticed her assistant into the sunlight for examination purposes, afraid that for lack of its usual nourishment his most noticeable feature was withering and dying away.

"How many new hen-coops have we made, Mr. McQuat?" she asked, reassured by her inspection.

"A'm on wi' the fifth one the noo," replied the perspiring Alexis. "But when I've got it finished ye'll need to buy a few mair packing-cases. How's it answering? Are ye getting any mair eggs?"

"We're doing all right, Mr. McQuat," said

the lady, with a satisfied smile. "But how we should get on without your assistance, dear only knows. My, it's a great thing to be a man! I wish I was one!"

"I'm danged glad she isna," muttered McQuat.

With a smile of gratification that looked like being everlasting, he resumed the task of building up a respectable coop out of an old candy box, while the proprietress carried a bucket of hot food into the sun-baked strip of garden to distribute among some pens of birds she was fattening for the market.

From time to time he paused in his task. Every pause seemed devoted to looking to see what the widow was busy with. First he saw her right at the bottom of the fenced-in garden bending, spoon in hand, over the coops containing the birds for fattening with a motherly air.

"My, but it's a pity she hasna a wean or so," he muttered sentimentally. Selecting a piece of wood he measured it roughly against the half-constructed coop and began to saw with fervour. "I don't know what she'd do wi' the wee de'ils if she did have them," he said to himself.

"Anyway she wouldna have much time for me."

When he looked again she was half-way up the path, about to enter the old fowl run, a run which he himself had made some five years before out of discarded bamboo *kelongs* and traps obtained from Malay fishermen. A moment after loud squawking announced the capture of a fowl.

"Mr. McQuat!" called the widow.

He put on his battered topee and hurried down the path.

"Here's another odd job for you," she said, coming out. "Do you know her?" She held up the fowl.

"It's auld Betty," exclaimed McQuat, peering.

"Yes, it's her."

"Goo, she must be an auld yin!"

"She's the one, you remember, Mr. McQuat," the widow reminded him, "that flew through the window about four years ago, when you were chasing her out of the room after coming home from meeting some of your friends, and broke two bottles of beer you had standing there to cool."

"I mind ye," said McQuat to the hen. "Ye auld limb of Satan!"

"Poor thing," said Mrs. Vanderpump tenderly. "A rat must have got at her. She's broken her leg. Look at it!"

She held out a scaly claw for the handy man's inspection.

"Ay, it's broken, sure enough," he said briefly after a glance. "We shall have to be about bandaging her up, I suppose."

"I could no more kill her than fly," remarked Mrs. Vanderpump, taking no notice of the last remark. "But she's got to go."

Alexis stared.

"She broke your bottles of beer," the widow reminded him. "It's a fine thing to have a man about the house."

"You want me to——" muttered Alexis at last.

"I must run down to the *kedei* to buy some rice," murmured Mrs. Vanderpump in some agitation. "She's got to go, and you—you don't like her because of your beer. So I leave her to you."

She thrust the bird into his nerveless hands and went hastily indoors.

He stared stupidly at the bungalow as if expecting her to come out again, but she did not do so, and a moment after the banging of the front door notified her departure.

At the sound he started. He had heard doors banged before, usually when he was about to enter them, and had thought little about it. This one, judging from the quality of the noise it made, might have been a coffin lid.

Now that the widow had departed the little bungalow seemed strangely quiet. Life had indeed forsaken it. In the deep silence he noticed that the clock inside had a tick. Strange that he had not noticed this before !

The fowl gave a feeble cluck. He laid it on his bench and, pulling himself together, glanced round for a means of carrying out the widow's instructions. His wandering eyes rested for a moment on a knife stuck in the mat wall, discarded this, and wandered on. They met the eyes of his intended victim and dropped hastily. How was the thing done ? Now he came to think of it he had never before been present at a chicken's end.

His eye, wandering again, rested on a small zinc washing bath filled with water.

He seized the fowl, and, in order to stop a series of squawks calculated to apprise all the neighbourhood of the crime he was about to commit, plunged it below the surface of the water.

It resisted with vigour, clawing its assailant severely about the hands. As after what seemed five minutes its kicks grew no weaker, and indeed the water appeared actually to strengthen them, the perspiring Alexis drew it out and, shuddering, twisted its head madly round and round in an attempt to wring its neck. This treatment seemed to be the right one. Its struggles grew feebler, and finally ceased.

With a shudder he dropped it on the floor, and, sitting down, gazed at his handiwork. Never did he see anything look quieter than that poor bird. Yes, he had done it! Its blood was on his head! So quiet! So still!

But except for that odd stillness the fowl had little appearance of being dead. It might have been asleep.

"Puir burrd!" he muttered, and, shutting his

eyes and lifting his arm, brushed away a tear with a ragged coat sleeve. Betty, his feathered friend of five years' standing, was dead. He felt sorry for her. He forgave her those two bottles of beer. Well, it would be all the same a hundred years afterwards !

A sudden rustling and clucking caused the mourner to remove his coat sleeve, open his eyes, and then sit bolt upright in his chair. In astonishment he beheld the dead fowl, after a vigorous flutter, stretch one leg and then another, rise, shake herself. Then, as if unconscious that anything extraordinary had happened, she began calmly to pick up crumbs from the ground.

"Goo !" gasped the mourner. "Goo !"

The hen, possibly mistaking this exclamation for the name of a new kind of food, raised her head, looked, and walked towards him. She walked with the grace of a pullet.

"Why !" exclaimed the delighted Alexis. "She—I've cured her !"

The widow, entering a few minutes later, found him feeding the hen with paddy, and listened with much interest to the recital of his adventures. It appeared that her belief in cold

water had received additional support from the fact of the hen's miraculous recovery, and that in her opinion people in general would live longer and happier lives if they refrained from mixing that innocent liquid with spirits.

"I never do, ye ken, Mrs. Vanderpump," said McQuat with a laugh. "I wouldna spile good whisky."

He withdrew to next door, and after an attempt at smartening up departed for the Post Office. The spending of the last ten dollars had torn his only pair of trousers. The mended garments, however, were still well enough in front.

Of late, communications from Scotland addressed to Campbell had arrived less often, and none of them had contained money. But to-day the native clerk had a letter for him in the well-known writing.

He at once turned his back on the counter, and tore open the envelope. Finding no money and not at the moment requiring good advice, he thrust the letter into his pocket and returned home.

It was two or three days before he was

reminded of the letter by its dropping out on the floor. He unfolded and inspected it, and was about to toss it aside when a postscript caught his eye. He glanced at this, read it quickly, and then again more slowly, his features gradually lengthening.

By teatime his face had achieved a length that caused Mrs. Vanderpump to ask in some concern why he looked unhappy. He replied that he had been thinking, and laughed bitterly. With the second cup of tea, however, he grew more cheerful, and, producing the letter, asked her advice.

She read the postscript aloud :

"I heard from your half-sister Janet in America last week. She says her son is sailing for Jallagar at once as he has got some appointment under the Government there. This is a great surprise to me and will be a greater one to you. I have no doubt you will try to help the boy all you can. He is your nephew and has a right to ask you for the help of your position and influence.

"JANET CAMPBELL."

"Who's Janet Campbell?" she inquired in some suspicion.

"Ma mither," replied Alexis, looking steadily away from her.

"Ah, she'll be married again," reflected the widow. "Unlucky woman! When did your poor father die, Mr. McQuat?"

"Die?" burst out the odd-job man enthusiastically. "He's no deid. He's as healthy as a bairn yet. We dunna dee so easily in the Hielan's, I'd have ye know, Mrs. Vanderpump."

He ceased, suddenly conscious that the widow was eyeing him with extreme suspicion.

"Then your name's not McQuat, after all," said she. "You're a walking alibi, are you? What do you say?"

McQuat was understood to deny being any such thing.

"Campbell, Campbell," muttered Mrs. Vanderpump, her forehead all wrinkled. "Where have I heard the name? I am sure it was about something underhand and dirty. Now—No, it wasn't that—Yes, that was it. I know you now, Mr. Alexis Campbell."

"Ye canna," muttered McQuat, quailing under her indignant gaze.

"I do," asseverated Mrs. Vanderpump accusingly. "You're the man that knocked the policeman down in Pelung and made off with his helmet and whistle. You're the man that kept the whole police force, including my late husband, out of bed for three nights, sitting in public-houses waiting for you to come in. Yes, you are. You can't look me in the face and say you are not. You ought to be ashamed of yourself, you great strong lout, knocking down a little policeman that couldn't defend himself——"

"He was bigger than me," interrupted Alexis indignantly.

"It doesn't matter if he was. You'd no business to do it. Keeping people out of bed three nights! Keeping me out of bed three nights! I've a good mind to hand you over to the police. They'd be glad to get you even now!"

McQuat remarked moodily that she could if she liked, but that it would be a dirty trick.

"I know I can, without you telling me," cried the widow with an appearance of great

wrath. "But I won't. No, my lad, I've had you in training for a good few years now, and if they put you in jail they'd spoil all my good work. But look out! I said if I got to know your secrets I'd give you a bad time. Just try coming home drunk again! Just you try! I'll show you!"

She bit her lips to hide a smile and, turning her back on him, looked at the letter again, thinking the while how she could best turn McQuat's obvious dread of the police to his advantage.

"Your nephew might be here by any boat now," she said at last.

Alexis agreed dismally that this was possible.

"There's just one chance for you."

"What's that?" inquired Alexis eagerly.

"Get a constant job and work hard at it," replied Mrs. Vanderpump, sitting down with an air of finality.

In reply to the Scotsman's insinuation that he had one already, she said that if he were a married man he would have to make hen-coops every evening after a day's full work, and probably perambulators as well. As for the

employers of Jallagar being banded together to refuse him a job, she declined to believe anything of the sort without further evidence.

"You're an aggravating man, that's what you are, Mr. McQuat," she ended. "You're like the rest of your sex. When a woman produces a plan for your good that means a bit of work, all you seem anxious to do is to squash it. If I didn't know you well, Mr. McQuat, I should say you were heart-lazy. Now I'll make you an offer. If I get you a good job will you take it?"

On McQuat's announcing after some hesitation that he would, she sat down, wrote a letter on some Chinese packing paper, sealed it with green wax in a Chinese red tissue-paper envelope, and bade him go and deliver the missive to Miss Melita Vannery.

From her tone in giving the order she might have been a foreman herself, but McQuat, prepared to do more than ever to oblige her now she knew him so well, meekly put on his topee and departed.

Outside he found the weather bright and sunshiny—too bright, in fact, for a man wearing patched trousers. The Eurasian quarter with its

irregular lanes, banyan trees, and bamboo hedges, its modest ragged palms, its gardens full of washing out to dry, seemed oddly alive that day. Old acquaintances who were no longer his friends passed him at every corner, their backs turned on him. He stood against the fence to let them pass, determined for special reasons not to imitate their impoliteness.

The pavement beside the colonnaded gaudy shops was thronged. Among so many strangers he felt easier. But once clear of the town and on the less frequented road that led up the hill, he again had several fits of afterthoughts, and blamed the sun bitterly for shining on his back.

It was a thirsty business climbing up to the European settlement, and the place when he got there seemed one of the worst examples of town-planning he had ever encountered. There was not a sign of a public-house anywhere. He had no personal interest in the matter, as lack of means would have prevented him from entering one. The best he could hope for was to obtain refreshment by luck or charity.

He thought it was to be by the former when at the entrance to the Residency he came across

a market-basket full of purchases that some Chinese servant must have left for a moment while going into the adjoining plantation. But the gaudy beer-bottle that had caught his eye proved on test to contain only paraffin-oil.

Expectorating tremendously, he replaced it in the basket and continued on his way.

He had never been to the Residency before, and the sight of the large house as he emerged from the drive caused him for a moment to feel timid. But he recollected that, whilst he did not want any goings-on behind his back, there was no reason why he should not face anything, and advanced boldly, noting with some approval the banks of flowers, the lawn with its nets and scattered tennis-balls, the comfortable chairs, and especially the lavish display of decanter, siphons, and glasses on a table near the door. These were signs of revelry, but the guests had mostly departed, the only person in sight being a young lady whom on drawing close he recognized as Miss Vannery.

With doffed topee and adopting the mincing gait which he kept for society purposes, Alexis advanced and handed her the letter. In reply

to her inquiry he admitted that he was the McQuat mentioned therein.

"I've seen you before, Mr. McQuat," said Melita, "but I can't think when. If you will sit down and make yourself comfortable I will show my father the letter. He may be able to do something."

She waved her hand charitably towards the table and went indoors ; but owing to the stopper of the decanter being tight, Alexis did not succeed in making himself quite as comfortable as he could have wished before the Resident came out.

The interview was brief, and Mr. Vannery not what is usually considered cordial. There was no immediate vacancy, he said, temporary or otherwise, in the Government employment. But Mr. Kamp, the Postmaster-General, would be back from a visit to out-stations in a week, and, if Mr. McQuat would call on him then, perhaps something might be done.

Murmuring profuse thanks, McQuat began to withdraw backwards, imitating so far as he was able the stately walk of a royal usher he had seen on the stage in a Glasgow pantomime. He knew that the Resident of Jallagar represented the

King, and that it was usual for suitors to leave the presence thus. In the present condition of his wardrobe he had nothing to say against the custom.

He was barely ten yards away from the Resident, who stood in a dignified attitude watching him, when he was horrified to feel something dragging against his legs at the back. He clapped his hand behind him. All was so far well. Then, looking on the ground, he perceived that his calves were receiving flattering attention from an enormous tortoise-shell cat.

He stooped gingerly and stroked the animal, who responded with fervour; and, perceiving through the corner of his eye that the spectacle was affording the Resident some pleasure, he ventured to remark—

“Beg your pardon, Resident, sir, but she’s a fine animal.”

“An exceedingly noble cat, Mr. McQuat,” responded Mr. Vannery in a very different tone from the one he had used just before. “Keep stroking, Mr. McQuat, if she likes it.”

Alexis bent again, and the cat purred more loudly than ever.

"Really," said the Resident, coming up, "that is most interesting. You have a way with cats, Mr. McQuat. I've never seen her so affectionate."

"Yes, sir, I know something about cats," agreed Alexis modestly.

He straightened himself, cleared his throat, and waited for any further compliments that might be handed him. It was a pleasant place, this garden, and he might do worse than come again.

"Yes, I see you are not ignorant of the cat tribe," acknowledged Mr. Vannery. "You called this one 'she,' whereas most people mistake her for a tom."

"Ah, sir, ye'll never get a tom tortoise-shell," said Alexis, venturing a knowing but respectful smile. "At ony rate they're no common. I've ony seen twa in the last twenty year."

"You've actually seen two ! What good fortune !" cried Mr. Vannery eagerly. "Where ?"

"Well, sir, one on Jallagar Island."

"I'll give you or any one else five hundred dollars cash for one," said the Resident in great excitement. "Try and get one for me, and I'll see you never want work."

After carefully considering all sides of the question on the way home, Alexis came to the conclusion that it would be mere foolishness to tell the widow or anyone else of such an easy way of earning money.

CHAPTER XII

HAD the method of procedure rested entirely with Alexis McQuat, he would have borrowed the widow's savings and scoured the Malay Archipelago in his search for a male tortoise-shell cat. But although he hinted at a secret scheme of great importance, to carry out which the blind assistance of some trusting financier was necessary, he could not induce her to lend him money, and much to his disgust was forced to content himself with short excursions to native villages within walking distance, in all of which male tortoise-shells had been seen, but which on investigation proved barren.

After a fruitless trip of six miles over swamp to an inland *kampong* where, according to a rather deaf Chinaman in the bazaar, dwelt the very cat required, McQuat decided in disgust to give up his walking expeditions. The fact that, when

taxed next day with deceit, the Chinaman explained that he understood a mangy, not a male, was the particular brand of tortoise-shell required, strengthened this decision, and Alexis in future hunted the tortoise-shell by proxy only.

The natives of Jallagar, experienced in European ways, are averse from working without an advance on wages, and McQuat, who was in no position to satisfy such a demand, found some difficulty in enlisting help.

Search, however, revealed a man or two ready to work on hope ; and these scoured the island for him. They did not succeed in catching anything but malaria, but they brought back with them the information that both Mr. Kamp and also the new American *Tuan* at the Post Office had a man out on the same errand, and that the rewards that these two promised were as millions compared with that offered by their own stingy employer.

Little had been heard of the fourth searcher, Bunn, since his departure for Pelung. An article in the *Patriotic Pelunger*, an Eurasian newspaper, entitled "Gross Tyranny at the Jallagar Post Office : an Interview with a Distinguished

Ex-Official," was ascribed to him only by close students of social affairs in the island. And even his wife did not connect the disreputable person who was arrested and sentenced to a month's hard labour for running up and down the lawn at Government House carrying a parrot cage, while the Governor was having breakfast, with the absent ex-postmaster.

An anonymous postcard received later, on which was written "In jug for airing a grievance before H.E.," and signed with a rough drawing of a hot-cross bun, told her without anyone else being much the wiser what had happened, and how angry her husband was about it. But she kept the information secret, contenting herself with informing curious friends that Mr. Bunn had accepted temporary employment as a civil engineer on the Government's new breakwater, and that it might be several months before the job came to an end.

The spread of this rumour was the means of her obtaining quite a good credit with the Jallagar tradespeople, and nobody was more surprised than the local grocer when the ex-postmaster returned by the mail steamer from Pelung

exactly a month after the day he sailed for that metropolis.

He looked thinner than when he departed, and his hands were horny to the touch. Otherwise Pelung jail had left no mark on him, unless it might have been an irritating air of mystery, and an odd disinclination to afford Mrs. Bunn any information whatever. To her anxious queries he returned answers which told her nothing at all with all the pompous phraseology of an official letter. After a morning spent in his household, he put on his topee and left the bungalow to seek Professor Bliss.

He found that gentleman, just after tiffin, in his little room at the back of the Post Office, and, after looking hesitatingly for some time at his somnolent form through the open window, went round to the door and entered on tiptoe. A feeble cough that failed to arouse the sleeper he followed up by a clearing of the throat loud enough to dislocate all the joists in the building.

The professor sat up rapidly and blinked.

"What, Mr. Bunn!" he exclaimed.

The ex-postmaster nodded gleefully. Then, to Haliburton J.'s further astonishment, he tiptoed

mysteriously across the floor, bent over, and using his topee as a sound transmitter, whispered :

“I’ve got him !”

“Got whom ?” asked the professor, gazing at him stupidly.

“The cat, sah !”

“The cat—oh, have you ?” muttered the professor in a sleepy voice. “I didn’t know you had lost one. The cat——”

“I didn’t get it from my aunt in Tiak either, sah,” said Bunn. “I got ’im——”

“You don’t mean to tell me,” cried the professor, jumping up from his chair, “that you’ve succeeded in obtaining a male tortoise-shell cat ?”

“That’s what I’m busy about,” returned the half-caste, beaming. “Yes, sah, I got ’im safe enough. Locked up in my cabin aboard the *Sherrybung*.”

“Why didn’t you bring him here ?” asked the professor, excitedly. “Can I see him ?”

On Bunn’s explaining that male tortoise-shells never went abroad during the day, fearing abduction, he consented to pay a visit to the mail steamer.

Once outside the neighbourhood of the Post

Office and its master, whom they caught a glimpse of scowling at them as they passed his window, the half-caste began to relate the history of his trip. It was a story with a perfect hero whose immense ability had carried him through a series of misfortunes that would have overcome any ordinary man. From an ocean of narrative, dotted with I's, the professor collected the history so far as known of the cat. It seemed that the animal, one of the royal Tiak strain, had been stolen by a desperate criminal, and thus came naturally into the hands of the head native jailer of Pelung. That worthy, taking a great fancy to Bunn, as indeed did all the other people in the story, and hearing that he carried a parrot cage about with him with the object of being in a position to take immediate advantage of any offer of a male tortoise-shell, had let him out of jail a fortnight before his time, and had entrusted the cat to him for disposal.

This story continued in full flow all the way to the small dirty cabin on the *Sherrybung* occupied by the ex-postmaster, and whilst the cat, a perfect specimen with enormous whiskers, was taken from the parrot's cage and examined. Haliburton

J. said good-bye before the final chapter had been reached and, after giving the half-caste a few instructions, hurried back to his office, scribbled a note of excuse to the Resident urging private affairs, and, calling a rickshaw, made at full speed for the Residency.

Miss Vannery was not at home when he arrived and, as he decided to wait and seemed in a hot condition, the head boy showed him into the Residency drawing-room, gave him a fan, and left him to cool.

A delightful breeze coming from the sea was blowing through the half-closed shutters, and he took a seat opposite a long French window to derive full benefit from its freshness. Everywhere he saw traces of Melita—in the piece of needlework on one of the sofas, in the music on the open grand piano. He thought, too, the arrangement of the flowers in the vases was her handiwork. Drawings, some of them portraits of former Residents of Jallagar, lined the polished mahogany walls, but the photographs on the tables were mostly those of cats.

It was some time since he had been at the Residency, Mr. Vannery on his last visit having

treated him with a coolness he could not account for. Melita seemed anxious to hold the balance between him and his rival. The Swede had recovered all the ground he had lost at the tennis tournament, and was at the Residency more than ever. Indeed, society in the island had buzzed more than once with the news of his definite engagement to Melita, but, much to the relief of the anxious professor, the news had not yet been confirmed.

He still had hopes, based principally on the fact that when he met the girl she always asked him with an air of interest if he had found the cat. As a scientist he had held doubts as to the existence of male tortoise-shells. Now all was changed. Doubt was impossible. The clouds had rolled away. He had the cat——

He had got as far as this when she came in, dressed as usual in white, her dark keen face faintly glowing.

"Miss Vannery—Melita," he said, advancing. "I am pleased to see you. I've great news!"

The dropping of his eyeglasses spoilt rather the effect of his opening. He stooped and recovered them in time to seize her outstretched

hand, shook it, and sat, bolt upright, in the chair she indicated.

"I've great news," he repeated, wiping his glasses. Balancing them on his nose he regarded her in triumph.

"That is very pleasant," she said evenly, and sat on the chair opposite.

She looked friendly but watchful. Somehow the professor felt disappointed.

"Melita—Miss Vannery," he began again, reversing the order. "It's wonderful news, great news. I only heard it just now, and directly I did I rushed up—I mean the rickshaw puller rushed up—the hill."

"How stupid of him!" interrupted Melita, with a smile. "In this weather!"

"Er—like you, I felt sorry for him," stumbled Haliburton J.

"Most of them die early of heart disease," remarked Melita severely.

The professor, his temperature lessening rapidly, stared at her.

"Why did the rickshaw puller rush up the hill?" she asked. "Dear me! It sounds like a riddle!"

She looked at the professor, her lips twitching.

"I was going to tell you," explained the professor in an injured tone. He leant over and whispered impressively, "Because I've found a male tortoise-shell cat."

Sitting back in his chair he waited to observe the effect of his news.

"No," declared Melita brightly. "The answer is: 'To keep himself warm.'" She laughed merrily. "I'm sorry," she exclaimed, "but you do look so solemn. So you've found a male tortoise-shell cat! Now tell me all about it."

"It's an interesting story," said Haliburton J., "but rather long."

"I should like to hear it," said Melita briefly.

Sitting back on her chair with her eyes full on the professor, she listened patiently while he gave a rapid account of the half-caste's dismissal, journey to Pelung, and adventures in that city. It was a story that, no matter how he tried to gloss it, sounded, the professor was conscious, none too creditable; and he glanced at her anxiously when she asked him to tell her again exactly how the jailer at Pelung obtained possession of the animal.

"It seems to me that the cat is little better than stolen property," she commented when he had finished. "I think your correct course would be to hand the cat back to the Sultan of Tiak."

The crestfallen professor looked at her in astonishment; then, noticing that although her face looked stern her eyes were sparkling with merriment, he said with great decision :

"I shall never give up the cat."

"Perhaps Mr. Bunn will not be of the same opinion when I have had a talk with him," pointed out Melita offhandedly. "After all, it's his cat, I believe. Will you take me down to the ship? You say you left him there? Let me see," she continued briskly, "the carriage goes down to fetch father from the office at four. That leaves me ten minutes to put my hat on. Thank you so much for coming, Professor Bliss."

She turned to leave the room, looking beyond all belief cool and cheerful. The feeling of confidence and triumph with which the professor had come to the Residency vanished. Near the door was a mirror. Half-consciously she glanced

at it and saw therein the reflection of his face. He was looking extremely dejected. She turned.

"Oh, one thing I forgot," said she. "I hope your Mr. Bunn is a nice man. I shall be rather sorry if he isn't. For I've promised myself to be very kind to the man who gives a male tortoise-shell cat to my father."

"The cat is mine, or as good as," said Haliburton J. in a determined voice. "Miss Vannery, I wish you'd let me say what I want to say."

"We haven't time now," Melita returned with a faint blush. Again she made to go. At the door she turned and made a further remark. "Besides," she said, "I detest this native-like custom of demanding one's wages in advance."

During the drive down to the ship she talked of things in general, resisting skilfully his efforts to stray into the particular.

The mate of the *Sherrybung*, Mr. Jones, sighted the carriage as it drew up on the wharf, and hastened down the accommodation ladder to meet them. Under his escort they reached the cabin.

The door was on the hook, and the sound of snoring issued from within. At the mate's loud knock the snoring ceased, and was immediately

succeeded by the noise of a heavy body falling to the ground. The door opened, and the ex-postmaster, dressed in very little, appeared, rubbing his eyes. At the sight of the Resident's daughter he banged-to the door.

"He's shy," explained the mate to Haliburton J.

"Tell him we've come to see his cat."

The sound of drawers being opened and shut and the clink of crockery proceeded from within.

"He's dressing," said the mate with a smile and, bending, he shouted a message through the keyhole.

"All right, sah, at once," cried an excited voice from within.

Thirty seconds later the door swung open as if by magic. The half-caste appeared in the doorway clad in dazzling white, his well-oiled hair carefully parted in the middle.

In his hand he carried the parrot cage which he at once proceeded to deposit on the deck. A heavy cloth concealed the cage. It had been put over it, the ex-postmaster explained, to allow the cat to sleep.

"He is sleeping now, sah," continued Bunn

with a huge chuckle. "Ah, Miss Vannery, now I got the cat I ask your father for good job as cat-keeper. I know all about cats. This one is always very surprised and angry when I wake him. So we must take care. You just lift the cloth, missie. No? Then I will! Here goes!"

He swept aside the cage's cover with a flourish; sprung back in astonishment, stooped, peered, and then leapt about a foot in the air with a cry of intense anger and dismay.

The cage was empty.

"Why, the cat's gone," gasped the professor.

"So it seems," agreed Miss Vannery coldly.

"I can't believe it," said the professor helplessly, in a husky voice. "I can't believe it."

Neither apparently could Bunn, for, after leaping into the air for a second time, he shouted a string of blood-curdling monosyllables in the Hottentot language—syllables which the professor afterwards found meant "your mother won't know you when I've finished with you"—pounced on the cage, turned it upside down, and shook it violently.

Nothing came to light except a banana skin and a few bird seeds, left behind by a former

tenant. After persevering at least half a minute the half-caste flung the cage to the ground, and, speechless with emotion, stood gazing from one to another, his eyes rolling so vigorously that Miss Vannery in some alarm drew back a pace in an endeavour to get out of range of them.

It is said that Americans have readier wits than their European brothers, and certainly the professor was the first to bring a little practical common-sense to bear on the situation.

The others saw him dart suddenly into the cabin and, dropping on all-fours, make a tour of the floor lipping all the while seductively :

“Puss, puss, puss.”

But no cat answered his invitation, and after a while, disregarding the mate's offer to come in and help by talking to the cat in Malay, as it probably didn't understand English, he arose and came out again.

“We must search the ship,” he told the mate sternly. “The animal must be close at hand. It wouldn't dare go ashore, I think.”

“If Miss Vannery wants me to I'll call out all hands and have a search at once,” returned Mr. Jones. “But it would not do any good I'm

sure. Somebody has stolen the cat. Why, the cage door was shut."

"I think so too," agreed Miss Vannery. "Cats have a way of being stolen," she went on, looking straight at the unfortunate professor, "and, when one of them forms the habit, I advise everybody to have nothing to do with it. Evidently some one has taken this one when Mr. Bunn was absent for a moment."

"But that seems impossible," urged Haliburton J. "Bunn has never left its side for an instant. Have you, Mr. Bunn?"

The ex-postmaster said he had not, even for sleeping purposes. In answer to a question from the mate, he said that the man who was drinking a bottle of beer with him outside the cabin door was Mr. Kamp's chief clerk.

"But he's your greatest enemy," cried the professor.

The ex-postmaster looked at him scornfully.

"I may be black man, sah," he said with simple dignity, "but I'm also Christian gentleman. When my enemy comes to me with a bottle of beer in one hand and a glass in the other, who am I that I should go empty away?"

The short silence that succeeded this speech was broken by Miss Vannery, who said that her father must be waiting for her to drive home with him.

Both the professor and the mate offered to accompany her to the carriage, but she declared that she preferred to go alone. The professor tried hard to believe that one-third of the smile she handed out on departure was meant for him.

CHAPTER XIII

MELITA VANNERY walked quickly down the accommodation ladder on to the wharf and, threading a passage through the bales of merchandise already discharged from the *Sherrybung*, gained the main street of Jallagar. Here she turned to the right and, keeping in the centre of the roadway, for the covered foot-path beside the shops was too crowded to make progress easy, directed her steps towards the Government Offices.

Amber light from the setting sun now flooded the earth. Zephyrs from the mountains of the mainland had stolen all fire from the air. Sea and sky were of a deep unsullied blue. The stillness of palm-grove and casuarina-lined beach lent to the island an air of calm and contemplation.

The main street, as usual on mail days, was crowded, Melita an object of intense interest to

the blue-clad, long-haired countryfolk who, in Sunday silver, with their shaven-headed babies in baskets behind them, had come into Jallagar from their paddy fields intent on seeing all the sights.

They turned and stared with the frank rudeness of the simple savage as she passed. The more gaily-clad townsfolk were used to the sight of an unveiled missie, and made way for her with pleasant indifference. But her friends in the place were many, and she stopped at least half a dozen times to listen while elderly gentlemen in elaborate turbans gave her with great deliberation the latest news of their families.

The last of these, more than usually garrulous on the subject of a mysterious stomach-ache that affected his grandson, delayed her longer than he had any right to do, and, in spite of covering at her quickest pace the last hundred yards of the road, she found her father already seated in the carriage and waiting impatiently.

"You are nearly ten minutes late," he complained as they drove away, "and I shall not be in time to see the cats fed. You know how much better they eat when I am with them."

Melita nodded and apologized. Her father's real reason for wishing to be present at the feast was, she knew, to prevent the Chinese boy from stealing the milk.

Sighing, she reflected how changed he was. In the days before Kamp became his friend he had been a simple generous-hearted man, the kindest company she could ever desire. But since the fat Swede's arrival a change had occurred in him.

Nowadays he was wrapped up in his hobby. Every interest, his own as other people's, had to give way to that of the cats. Always inclined to be frugal, on behalf of these animals he had lately become for a Resident absolutely mean, and kept an exceedingly tight hand on all expenditure.

Once she had spoken to him about the smallness of her allowance. He had responded by talking vaguely about hard times and bad investments. It was an irritating, mannish method of defence. Not being bred in the school of *Oliver Twist*, she did not ask for more. She had a suspicion that Kamp, who lived in a style far beyond that which his salary or position justified him in doing, was in some manner robbing her father.

It was this man who was the worst feature of a situation that from her point of view had not a spark of humour in it. For months past he had spent most evenings at the Residency. At first he had not sought her society ; but for the last few weeks she had been the object of an exhibition of what he evidently thought was the art of courtship.

She had put up with this for a while, but at last lost control of herself, and had asked that if the fat Swede must come to the house he should at least be kept away from her. On that occasion her father had turned on her and spoken in a way he would never have done in the old days.

This happened at a time when the mail steamer was about to sail. She had at once gone to her room and packed a trunk, determined to leave the island rather than to be humiliated further. But on reflection, perceiving that her father needed protecting more than she did, and that her departure would be merely a desertion, she changed her mind and unpacked again.

A visit to the *Sherrybung* always reminded her of that eventful afternoon, and as the carriage drove along the white, flower-scented road she

glanced at her worried-looking parent and reflected that she did not regret the decision she had come to.

With her thoughts running in this vein, she answered the Resident absent-mindedly, and was surprised to find that she had quite unknowingly said "Yes, certainly," to a question when the correct answer was "No, certainly not."

"I'm astonished to hear you say so, Melita," replied Mr. Vannery, much irritated. "All historians agree that under Cleopatra cats occupied an extremely important position in the state, whereas subsequently under the Roman influence these animals were treated with less consideration. I fail to see how Egypt was the better for the change, and yet you say it certainly was. I must say your opinions change very rapidly, for only yesterday at breakfast, when with Kamp we were discussing the same matter, you said that it certainly was not."

"Hadn't Mr. Kamp put the question in a slightly different form?" asked Melita warily.

"He put it in a clearer form," admitted the Resident. "He has that gift. He knows so much more than I do about our religion—I

mean," he corrected himself hastily, "the doings of the old priesthood of Egypt."

Melita shivered slightly and looked away.

Not long before, in the middle of a very hot night, she had got up and walked through the silent house to get cool before trying again to sleep. In the farther wing, where the cats were kept, she noticed a ray of bright light streaming through a door. She looked in. After a few moments she stole away breathless. It was really horrible! Kamp, in embroidered, tasselled gown and curious headpiece, with the cats about him, on a daïs, holding a black, shining image high aloft! Kneeling in a white robe, muttering, groaning as if in agony, bending his forehead to the ground, was her father.

"You don't take so much interest in things Egyptian as you ought, I'm afraid," complained Mr. Vannery. "You know how it would please me if you did."

"Sometimes I do, sometimes I don't," replied Melita. "To-day I've been wondering about other things—how you got on in court, for instance. Did you have many cases?"

"About twenty,—I forget," said the Resident.

"But I finished them. They are stupid people, these Jallagar Malays. Kamp has a theory that, when Pharaoh's army was overwhelmed in the Red Sea, a few of the soldiers were rescued by fishermen and eventually settled in the Eastern Archipelago. That would account for the Egyptian cast of feature of some of the inhabitants."

"I think you're right, father," agreed Melita brightly. "When I was down at the *Sherrybung* to-day"—she had not the slightest intention of telling him about the cat—"I could not help noticing how clumsily they discharged the cargo. They seem to have no idea of order. Mr. Jones, the chief officer, spoke very funnily about them. Have you met Mr. Jones?"

"No," returned the Resident absently. "Dear me, Melita," he went on, suddenly excited, "look at that sunset! The sky is striped like a tortoise-shell. The religion of old Egypt! Its sign is even in the heavens!"

He lay back in the carriage and gazed rapturously at the gorgeous sky.

"What can that sign mean to me?" he muttered. "I know," he went on in a louder voice. "Melita, it was when you mentioned

Mr. Jones that I first noticed the sky. The explanation is simple. 'Mr. Jones will get you your tortoise-shell male cat,' is the message that the gods of Egypt have written in the heavens for me to read. Ask Mr. Jones to dinner at once! When can we have him? To-night?"

"Yes—I—I dare say we might manage it," murmured Melita.

"Speak up, Melita, I can't hear," said Mr. Vannery in an excited voice. "If you can manage it? You must manage it! I will send the carriage back to the ship for him at once! Spare no expense! Make the meal a good one; do you hear, Melita?"

"Yes, father."

"You don't seem very enthusiastic," he went on, looking at her searchingly. "Dear me, what's the matter with your eyes? They are glistening. There are tears running down your cheeks. Didn't you know? You've been staring straight at the sun and not using a veil. I've often told you to use a veil. No eyes can stand the glare of the tropical sun without protection. Put up your sunshade at once. I want you to look your best to-night when Mr. Jones comes. Ask Kamp

too, as I shall want his advice. No need to send the carriage for him. Send a boy. He won't mind when I tell him the importance of my discovery. Mr. Jones—fancy him being the means of discovering a tortoise-shell male and bringing me fame! A man I have never known! Isn't it strange, Melita?"

"Very strange."

"I hope he won't take long to find the cat. It is a difficult business, I know, or Kamp would have got one before this," muttered the Resident, and relapsed into silence.

The glittering carriage rolled on through the shadows, past lines of salaaming natives, past huts where laughing women held their babies high to view the great ones. At the entrance of the Residency drive, a native in red livery stepped into the middle of the road waving his hand.

Melita recognized him as Kamp's servant. The carriage drew up, the harness clinking, and a footman, descending, brought the letter round to the Resident, who tore open the envelope and was at once deep in the contents. It was evident that they were absorbing, and his daughter

noticed with another pang his hurried breathing, his twitching features, the restless motion of his hands.

"Melita," he said at last in an excited whisper. "Melita, your father is a great man at last. It has come. I knew it would. The sunset showed it to me. Adolphus Kamp has got the cat, the male tortoise-shell. He wants us to go and see it. We will go at once. Tell the syce——"

"But I don't want to go to Mr. Kamp's bungalow," said Melita promptly. "I haven't time—there's this dinner to see about. You go by yourself. I'll get down."

She rose and started to open the carriage door, but the Resident caught her arm and pulled her back into her seat.

"Syce!" he shouted, in a high-pitched voice. "Drive on quickly to the *Tuan* Postmaster's house."

Five minutes later Mr. Vannery and his daughter were walking up the steps of the Swede's bungalow.

The proprietor, standing in the doorway, welcomed them with his usual bad imitation of

good-heartedness, and at once led the way to the big airy veranda.

"To-day I haf got it," he shouted. "Come and see! Oh, what a fine fellow! And a genuine male, Mr. Resident. Yes, you may be sure of dat. I wasn't going to give good money for nodings."

"I congratulate you," said Mr. Vannery. "Did it cost much?" he added eagerly.

"Five hundred dollars, and cheap at de brice," replied Adolphus. "Dere he is, on dat centre table under de lamp."

The excited Mr. Vannery dashed to the spot and at once fell into noisy raptures. They had put the animal into a small split rattan cage, something like a lobster pot in shape. It was no place, as Mr. Vannery pointed out, for such a rarity. But in spite of its cramped quarters the cat appeared to be comfortable. It was, as Kamp pointed out, a magnificent specimen with perfect markings and the bullet head of a male.

Melita said she did not like the look of it. It had the air, she said, of an animal destined for an early grave.

"He is de healthiest of cats," asseverated the

fat Swede. "You should see him eat! He gobbles down beefsteak like a lion."

"Perhaps he'll die of overeating," suggested Melita hopefully.

"My dear child!" exclaimed the excited Resident. "Listen to her, Kamp!"

The Swede laughed uproariously.

"Well, if it doesn't die of that, it will of something else," she said firmly. "That cat will not live long. I've a presentiment that within a week or two you will be attending its burial."

"My dear, forgive me, but you talk nonsense," said Mr. Vannery in an annoyed voice. "Hard-headed business people like me and the Postmaster-General don't pay any attention to presentiments, or for that matter any other superstition, do we, Kamp? We have a healthy cat. That's enough for us."

"Miss Melita doesn't like de cat," said the fat Swede cunningly. "She is sorry it's found."

"No, I'm not."

"Perhaps you are sorry I found it?"

"Do you think so?" said Melita coldly.

"I never tink," said the fat Swede with a sneer. "But I have what you call bresentiments."

"Where did you find it, by the way?" asked the Resident.

It was a question his daughter had been longing for some one to put. But the demeanour of the finder was flawless, and the answer he gave so circumstantial that she discarded as useless her half-formed intention of taxing him with stealing the animal from the *Sherrybung*.

"It is a pity you did not detain the Sakai from the mainland who brought it," remarked Mr. Vannery. "There may be more like it over there."

"Dere are not," declared the Swede. "I haf made many inquiries."

"Wherever it came from, I've no confidence in it," declared Melita. "It's marking does not appeal to me. As for its eyes, look at them! One's a different colour from the other."

"What?" cried Mr. Vannery. "So they are! Oh, great good fortune! Kamp, don't you remember in the manuscript it said that Cleopatra ascribed her rise to greatness to the fact that a cat she possessed had eyes like that? Oh, Mr. Kamp, how can I thank you?"

He bent over the cage again in rapture.

"You haf no luck to-day, Miss Melita," remarked Kamp in her ear.

It was what she had been thinking herself; she eyed him with inward fury.

"It is a very fine cat, and will live twenty years," he went on softly. "Alzo, having dis cat will make your fader live longer. He was worried much at not getting a tortoise-shell."

"You think so?"

"I tink so, you know so," said Adolphus with an oily smile. "He will alzo love me more for getting de cat. You, when you see him getting happy, will love me alzo."

"What?" said the indignant Melita. "I shall do nothing of the sort."

"You will," whispered Adolphus threateningly. "You have already bromised——"

"I——" began Melita, in alarm and dismay.

"This is indeed happiness," interrupted the Resident in an intense voice. "That is what I have lived for. To make a gift to the old gods! To raise again their line or to found a new one! I shall mate him, Kamp, with the best queen cat we have. We shall have a breed of males, a royal line, and I—I shall be no longer the

unknown, contemptible Resident of an out-of-the-way island. I shall be famous! My name will be in encyclopædias, to be handed down for generations, they will know me at the British Museum, the Cat Club, the Zoological Gardens——”

“Yust a minute though, Resident, please,” said the fat Swede. “Yust a leetle minute.”

“What is it?” asked the Resident, tearing his eyes away from the cat and looking up.

“One small thing,” said the Swede, “which you and perhaps Miss Melita have forgot.”

“What is that?”

“Why,” shouted Adolphus with a triumphant laugh, “the cat is not yours.”

“It is,” cried Mr. Vannery. “It must be.”

“But it is not,” contradicted the Swede, raising his voice. “I bought it. It is mine.”

“But our agreement?”

“That is nodings,” pointed out Adolphus calmly. “It is not in writing.”

“But I must have the cat,” screamed Mr. Vannery. “I must. It will—— What do you want for it?” he continued, striving obviously to regain calm. “I will give you anything.”

"What do you mean by anything?" inquired Adolphus.

"I mean," replied the Resident, "anything except the mummy and the two crocodiles."

"But will Miss Melita be willing to give me something also?"

"What is that?"

"What she bromised."

"Melita," muttered the Resident. He looked at her. "Oh yes," he continued weakly. "But I can't force that, I can't, Kamp. It rests with her. Remember, what she said was only said in fun."

"It was not in fun."

"What do you mean?" asked Miss Vannery coldly.

"You recollect a long time ago," said Adolphus in an oily voice, "when we talked at dinner. You said you were certain there was no such thing in this world as a male tortoise-shell. I asked you den, 'Would you marry a man if he got your fader one?' You said, laughing to me, 'Yes.' I have now got the cat for your fader. What have you to say about your bromise, please, Miss Melita?"

"I spoke in jest," said Melita with marked firmness.

"No, no, not in jest. I believed it for true."

"It was in fun."

"You hear, Mr. Vannery," began Adolphus.

But the Resident had again approached the table and, bending over the cage, appeared utterly absorbed.

"See your fader, how he loves de cat," whispered Adolphus, drawing close to her. "Come, Miss Melita, you say you spoke in joke. Listen to dis. Now I speak to you without joking. Why have you always zo disliked me, Miss Melita? Have I done anything to you? No, I have always been kind. To others I have not been kind. I could be different."

He scowled at her as if to show her how terrible he could be if he tried. Never had she seen him look greasier and more repulsive.

"Yes, I am kind man," he went on. "Your fader loves me. We are like son and parent. He leans on me. Without me he is nodings. We have many secrets together."

"I know you have," said the greatly

disturbed Melita, gazing at him with intense dislike.

"Look at your fader now. I know him. For months I have watched him. Listen, I will tell you. If your fader does not get that cat he will go mad; yes, he will go mad, and perhaps die. But I will make him happy. I am kind man. I will give him de cat."

"Thank you very much," said Melita faintly.

"I will give him de cat, but first you—Melita, I lof you. I must haf you. You must be my wife. I shall make you happy, I am kind man. What do you say, Melita? What do you say?"

He tried to take her hand, but she was too quick for him.

"You!" she said in a tone of disgust, drawing back. "You—I would never——"

"Wait a minute," said the fat Swede, holding up his hand. "Say noding before you hear your fader speak. Resident," he went on, raising his voice. "What if I refuse to give you dis cat?"

"Eh?" said Mr. Vannery, looking up.

"I say, what if I refuse to give you de cat?"

"But you won't, Kamp," said Mr. Vannery, darting across the veranda.

"Yes, I will."

"You can't You who know all it means to me! I'll give you anything you like to ask! You're a hard bargainer, I know; too hard sometimes. But you won't refuse me when I say I'll give you anything?"

"I will," declared Adolphus, snapping his fingers. "I don't care dat for you."

"Oh, you won't!" cried Mr. Vannery in a distraught voice. He made a dart and clutched the other's hand. "If you do I shall go mad," he ejaculated, beside himself. "I ask you!"

He appeared to be actually about to kneel. The dismayed Melita, growing deadly pale, caught and held him back.

"Come now," said Adolphus to her in a bullying tone. "You see what your fader tinks. What do you say? Will you keep your bromise?"

It seemed at that moment that all she could hope to gain just then was a little time.

"If you can bring the cat to-morrow evening to the Residency, if you can prove it is your cat

to give, I will promise to be your—your wife,” she replied helplessly.

“You will?”

“I will.”

“Subject of course to a strict medical examination of the cat,” put in the delighted Resident acutely.

“I thought you would,” cried Adolphus in triumph. “Good! Now I have ready a bottle of champagne to trink our healths. Come, we will trink!”

The overwrought Melita refused to do anything of the sort. When a few moments later she and her father were in the carriage about to drive away, the pop of a cork announced that her admirer was not to be baulked of his dissipation.

CHAPTER XIV

THE even clearness of that day was succeeded by a moonless night, when there was no sky but a black void above, no breeze but the play of currents of tepid air, when hut and bungalow were not outlined but only marked by twinkling lights ; an Egyptian night, suited for secret lovers, for cats, crocodiles, and prowlers ; suited especially for the walking abroad of gentlemen of tender susceptibilities concerning their attire.

One of these sensitive persons might have been detected by any one armed with a bull's-eye lantern, about seven oclock that evening, flitting along the road towards the European quarter. From the wavering pause he made before each public-house, and from the fact that he went on again without entering, the observer might have deduced that either modesty or teetotalism was acting to keep this sensitive person from strong drink.

The deduction would have been a wrong one, for the gentleman was neither an abstainer nor was he more than usually modest. The facts were that, firstly, owing to the deliberate neglect of a next-door neighbour, he had no money, and, secondly, he had but little spare time. The bull's-eye lantern flashed at the top of this wanderer revealed an oldish, fattish, good-humoured, red-nosed face surmounted by a broken-brimmed topee; the head-piece, in short, of Alexis McQuat.

At the moment this face did not exhibit its usual expression of devil-may-care good-humour. Rather there was on it a worried, harassed look. The fact was that Mr. McQuat was about to undertake something peculiarly unpleasant. He had, after a bitter quarrel with Mrs. Vanderpump, rushed out of the bungalow to ask some one he did not like for something he did not want. The some one was Mr. Adolphus Kamp, the something was work.

In an unguarded moment he had revealed to Mrs. Vanderpump the dread secret that by order of the Resident work was to be given him by the Postmaster-General if he asked for it. A week had elapsed since that revelation, the intensive

poultry plant was finished, and she had that day instituted a deliberate policy of giving him no peace.

She held up before him all the morning the picture of an American nephew driven into ill-health by the shame of the discovery of an uncle without visible means of support. She had asked also what he supposed she had given him the letter to Miss Vannery for.

When in a moment of pique he had replied that she probably desired to show the Resident's daughter that she had at least one respectable friend, she had more to say than ever, and, so it seemed to him, wanted to spend the whole day in having the last word.

Irritated, he had told her finally that he wanted none of her sauce. And then the spiteful creature had done a thing which had hurt his pride more than anything she said. In place of the dish of food, which for long had appeared on his table at sunset with a regularity that almost approached a rule, he found a plate empty, except for a piece of white paper.

On the paper was written, "You don't want any of my sauce! Hunger is the best sauce! I send you a bit."

There were limits to the endurance of even a humble beach-comber. Alexis, after looking at the plate, had sworn a mighty oath, an oath which made his next-door neighbour, after listening to it through the reed partition, stop her ears and threaten, in a high-pitched voice, to have him summoned for using bad language. Then, after making such changes in his attire as he thought necessary, and securing his braces by means of a bamboo skewer, he had sallied forth in pursuit of work.

"The day will come, missis," he whispered to himself as he stumbled townwards, "when you'll crawl to me on bended knee, ay, maybe with the wing of a spring chicken in your trembling hand, and I will up and refuse to eat it, ay, will I."

Such ruminations as these braced him up through the dark Eurasian quarter and the more brightly lighted town.

But they were not sufficient to carry him to the top of Jallagar hill and leave him buoyant at the end of it; and when, after exploring an unknown and pitch-dark lane and discovering nothing surprising there except deep ditches well supplied with water, he at last arrived at the fat

Swede's bungalow, he was in the frame of mind which, if the advertisements may be believed, drives strong men to the patent-medicine bottle.

McQuat, a weaker vessel, would have been satisfied with a bottle of a less unpleasant nature. Nothing of the sort being at hand, he contented himself with collecting his thoughts, and sitting down made such adjustments to his attire as would render him fit to face a Postmaster-General.

Whilst thus engaged a series of discordant yells caused him to turn round quickly and gaze earnestly at the bungalow. His first thought was that a dangerous criminal was abroad, his first impulse to rouse the police ; but second thoughts told him that they would not thank him for doing them such a bad turn. So he merely retreated a pace or two and remained on the watch.

The bungalow, so far as he could see, presented no unusual appearance. The veranda was better illuminated than most of those he knew. Light streamed from it, striving to pierce the surrounding blanket of darkness. All had become silent again. Proceeding again with his toilet, he began to unbutton his jacket, when a sudden sight arrested him. He glared in astonishment

at a drawn blind, on which had now appeared the silhouette of a pigtailed Chinaman with its head tilted and the mouth of a large champagne bottle held tight against its lips.

"Goo!" muttered the astonished McQuat as he watched the palpitating throat of the shadow. "This is a fine how-d'ye-do!"

The figure remained in its interesting attitude for what seemed to Alexis a quite unnecessary length of time. At last, as if moved by clockwork, it resumed its normal position. Another series of yelps, and a Chinese boy, flourishing a champagne-bottle, rattled down the entrance steps and ran across to and entered a lighted hut, from which a burst of music at once proceeded.

"Well, I've haired Kamp's a hard master," muttered McQuat in a voice that showed he was still as surprised as ever, "but he canna be so hard as they make out."

Slightly elated by the thought, he rebuttoned his coat and cautiously picked his way across the lawn to the bungalow. At the foot of the steps he stood for a while debating whether to ring or not. Then, reflecting that if he announced himself the Postmaster-General would perhaps not

see him, he quietly walked up without ringing and entered the veranda.

There were no servants to be seen. The loud noise of a concertina and the burst of song sufficiently showed their whereabouts. But a tremendous sound of snoring told of a creature somewhere in the bungalow, and, guided by the sound, the searcher after work crept modestly on. At the door of the dining-room he paused, peeped in, and then drew back with a startled air.

The table was laid with a white cloth. Fruit and flowers decked it. Glass and silver sparkled. So far, very respectable; but the other end of the room upon which the beach-comber's eye was riveted presented different features. Here was set an enormous dish on which reposed what looked like a roast turkey. There were small things scattered round it, little oblongs that reminded the eager onlooker of sausages. An uncorked bottle flanked the dish. It, with an overturned glass, gave an additional air of relaxation to a scene which did not in any way savour of the severe.

Seated in a chair opposite the bird, in a crumpled white suit, with his neck-band open

and his head thrown back, was the great Postmaster-General himself.

“Goo!” muttered McQuat sympathetically. “He’s a lad! Fancy snoring at a dinner like that!”

He stared at the sleeper, uncertain what to do. That awakened men are not particularly sympathetic listeners he knew, but, on the other hand, he also was of the opinion that, sleeping or waking, a moderate amount of liquor has a mellowing effect on a person’s character. He resolved to run the risk, and coughed heartily. But the cough had no effect, and a second attempt, longer drawn out, was similarly unsuccessful. Recognizing that he might stay there all night, earning a sore throat, if he did not change his methods, he was casting about for another polite means of overcoming the difficulty, when his eye caught an object on a chair in the corner that seemed to him entirely out of place in such a civilized scene.

What could that round paddy planter’s basket be doing there?

There seemed to be an animal asleep in it. It looked like a cat. On the other hand, cats

were not usually kept in such baskets. It might be a young leopard. Cats had not usually these black, yellow, and red markings. But these, too, were tortoise-shell markings, reflected McQuat, looking hard at the basket. Could it, then, be a tortoise-shell cat?

He tiptoed over to the chair and subjected the animal to a close scrutiny, growing every moment more excited.

"It is!" he muttered. "It is!"

He stood erect again and gazed around him helplessly. "It wouldn't do to wake Mr. Kamp now," he thought. "I'm on the wrong side of the table."

It occurred to him, also, that if the Chinese servants came in he might have some difficulty in explaining his position. Neither they nor their master would believe that a man in his senses would penetrate so far in search of such a thing as work.

To go away and leave the cat and the good dinner was hard, but he started to do so. Other men he knew wouldn't be so saintly. He, however——

Then temptation proved too strong. He

darted back suddenly, snatched the bottle from the table and stuffed it into his right jacket-pocket, stuffed a sausage or so in the other pocket, scattered most of the remainder on the floor and, snatching up the cat with its basket in one hand and the turkey in the other, bolted for the door.

Terror-struck at his own daring, he gained the lawn. Then, as a noise of voices came again from the servants' quarters, he lost his little remaining nerve, and, bursting through a hedge, made off blindly across country as if all the police in Jallagar were after him.

The first two hundred yards through an adjacent field was easy going. He did this distance in, it seemed to him, not more than half a minute. Later, flat racing had to be given up for steeplechasing, and progress was slower. In the end a coco-nut palm, which appeared to spring out of the darkness and hit him on the head, made a halt imperative. He lay down with sudden violence, and for some time showed no desire to rise. When he did rise, the late moon was up also and lending her feeble illumination to the world. With the aid of this comfortless light he found the road.

The dawn saw him noiselessly entering his bungalow, where he stowed cat and bird away in a cupboard, took a swig at the bottle and, half-undressed, tumbled into bed.

He was disturbed next morning by a sound that, in his sleep, he was sure he had heard somewhere before. He began to dream of muffins and told the man to take them away. Then the thump of some heavy object falling on the bed beside him roused him into wakefulness. He sat upright, and regarded in some amazement a large lemon that was perching on the bolster. Next he looked with suspicion at the top of the partition wall.

“Mr. McQuat !” shouted the widow. “Mr. McQuat !”

The beach-comber smiled to himself cunningly, winked, and pointed contemptuously with a backward motion of his thumb in the direction of the partition.

“She’s sorry for what she said yesterday,” he muttered.

He lay down again, and gave forth a loud but faulty imitation of a snore.

“Mercy, what a noise !” commented Mrs.

Vanderpump loudly. "I wonder if it is McQuat at all. It sounds more like some underfed pig."

"It's no' an underfed pig either," replied the irritated McQuat, sitting up.

"Whatever it is," reflected the widow more loudly still, "it's not a human being, leastways not a respectable one."

"Respectable enough to make your chicken run," shouted McQuat, sitting up straighter than ever.

"Dear me, I ought to know that voice," soliloquized Mrs. Vanderpump through a hole in the partition. "It reminds me of a well-known public singer, I mean public-house singer. Tut, tut, what was his name? Oh, I have it—Tiddley Tim, that's the man."

"I never did sing outside public-houses, wumman," roared McQuat indignantly. "You know that fine."

"When asked why he was singing outside he said it was because they wouldn't let him sing inside," went on his tormentor. "Oh yes, he has a good voice. I asked a man once whether he was fond of balls and he said he had been till he'd heard Tiddley Tim bawl."

"My name's McQuat!" yelled Alexis in great anger.

"Oh, is that you, Mr. McQuat?" cried the widow with an elaborate air of astonishment.

"Dear me, fancy that! And how are you the morning?"

"Och, I'm a' richt," said the Scotsman surlily.

"You sound as if you'd a sore throat," said Mrs. Vanderpump in concerned tones. "No wonder."

The beach-comber did not answer, but moving across the room, drew out a table. Going to a cupboard he brought out a plate and some table implements.

"Mr. McQuat," said the widow through the partition.

He took no notice.

"Mr. McQuat," went on the voice in tones of real contrition, "don't be angry. Do you know, five minutes after you went away last evening, I had such a nice supper waiting for you. That empty plate and bit of paper was only my joke."

"I'll teach her to joke," said McQuat to himself stubbornly.

He drew the table to the centre of the room,

and with a clatter and flourish laid the turkey and the bottle on it. Drawing up a chair, he sat down and began breakfast, observing with intense satisfaction the excited vibration of the reed wall, and the darkening of a certain peep-hole used by both of them, as the widow applying an eye carefully squinted in at him.

“Mr. McQuat,” she said again, appealingly.

In answer he picked up the bottle, flourished it with a jovial air, and drank deeply of the contents. He then cut off the turkey’s leg and began to pick it, only ceasing when he heard the widow move away and speak again.

“Poor fellow,” she soliloquized loudly. “I expect he’s had a bit of luck! Been out on the prowl and got some sort of a bone to gnaw.”

She retired to the garden, banging the door behind her.

“Goo! What a tongue!” muttered McQuat. He tried the leg again. Then, finding his appetite gone, he rose and slouched round in an attempt to put the room straight.

A hungry miaow called his attention to the cat. Going to the cupboard, he took the animal out of its basket and examined it. It was

undoubtedly what he had sought, a perfect specimen of a male tortoise-shell. A look in its amber eye—a look he did not admire—he put down to hunger, and offered it the turkey's leg. Its blank refusal of this half-finished dainty caused him to wonder what male tortoise-shells fed on, until the animal answered the question by biting him severely on the thumb. He dropped it before you could say "knife," but found time for a shorter monosyllable.

His attempts to recapture the cat, during the next ten minutes, afforded an excellent illustration of the proverb, "It is easy to stoop and pick up nothing," and when at last he had it in his grasp he did not rest until it was safe in the cupboard with the door locked upon it. He was free then to sit down, a condition which throughout life he had considered as essential to happiness. Dropping into a chair, he began with the aid of his bottle to plan his programme for the day.

A survey of the mosquito-net on the bed, which had parted at a seam rather than let the cat run up it, and of the broken crockery on the floor, confirmed his opinion that domestic animals were a mistake. He at once made up his mind

that his cleverest move would be to dispose of his newly-acquired pet to the Resident in exchange for the five hundred dollars with as little delay as possible. After a warm day spent in straightening up his little apartment he left the bungalow towards nightfall and made his way to the Residency.

Once in the open, the events of the previous night began to assume a bulk which they had not so far done. For the first time since his arrival in Jallagar he was actually glad when his acquaintances looked the other way.

For the day succeeding a first-class burglary there seemed but little stir in the hot streets. People sat in their doorways and basked, the Chinese fruit and lemonade sellers wrangled as calmly as ever. But McQuat eyed them all suspiciously. It was only when he saw a policeman laughing that he felt more at ease. Later he saw another laughing also. The double assurance of safety was extraordinarily comforting, and he was actually whistling a cheerful tune between his teeth as he walked up to the Residency.

His exit was not equally spirited. The Resident, who looked ill and worried, informed him

shortly that he had offered five hundred dollars for the first tortoise-shell male, but not for the second. He went on to say that some one else had obtained a tortoise-shell male, and was to deliver it at the Residency that evening. He could make no offer at present for any other cat, but—this was the single grain of comfort Alexis obtained—he would take Mr. McQuat's address and communicate further with him if necessary.

It struck the beach-comber when half-way down the drive that as a burglar he was not exactly wise in handing round his correct address. He turned back with the object of making good the error, thought better of it, and crawled slowly on towards home.

CHAPTER XV

THE failure to dispose of the cat that afternoon entailed certain disagreeable consequences which the humble beach-comber spent the first part of his journey in foreseeing. It was a beast which ever since it had bitten his thumb he was determined not to have on his hands longer than necessary. The fact that it refused to eat, but drank greedily, a way of living which, as every experienced man knew was no way of living at all, was an additional reason for disposing of it quickly.

Again, he had relied on the turkey to feed him until he received at least something on account from the Resident, and there seemed to be little chance now of any sale at all. Would he, after all, have to swallow Mrs. Vanderpump's insults to-morrow morning for breakfast in the hope that she would relent and give him something substantial for lunch? Never, he vowed, while there was a stone unturned in Jallagar.

True, there were few men left in the island to whom he had not already applied often for an emergency loan ; but money he would get from somewhere, or his name wasn't ——

He was passing the Post Office when ruminating thus, and the idea came to him to ask once again for letters. There were not any. The clerk was none too polite. He walked away down the steps and on.

Looking at the ground, his head between his shoulders, with a fixed resolve to find some trusting lender if he had to go the length of searching every public-house in Jallagar, he turned a corner and ran straight into the gentleman who, in his opinion, was the least likely to be that person of any, the young American.

With great presence of mind McQuat stood still, feeling ostentatiously in every pocket.

"Dear, dear, mister," he ejaculated, "if I havena been and forgot. Lying at hame it is this very minute !"

"What is ?" asked Haliburton.

"The money I owe ye. Just fancy now," he continued elaborately, "me forgetting that ! Ma heid's like a sieve !"

"That's all right," said Haliburton J. with a laugh. "Any time will do. Well, I must be going on. I'm in a hurry."

It had been the beach-comber's curse through life that he could never leave a job of this nature half done.

"It's a pity ye're in a hurry," he remarked brilliantly, "or ye might have come along home wi' me and gotten what I owe ye."

He relied on a refusal, but his knowledge of character did not extend to that of the scientist. An invitation to visit the home of a poor white seldom offers itself to the political economist; and the professor, disregarding his appointment, hastened to accept it.

"It's very kind of you to ask me," he replied. "I will come with you at once."

"But what about what ye was in a hurry for?" inquired the flabbergasted Alexis.

"Ah, that can wait," explained Professor Bliss, easily. "It was merely an invitation to tea at the club. I'd much rather have tea with you."

"Tea with me!" thought the beach-comber walking on in confusion. "Tea—with me, tea!"

His head in a whirl, he observed the stranger

turn to the right about and walk like a policeman at his side. At once he found himself the subject of a volley of questions concerning his habits, all of which he considered unduly personal, and none of which he could answer to his own satisfaction. With a brain unused to doing two things at once he found it impossible to evolve a deep-laid scheme for getting rid of this annoying person and at the same time explain that, though he had half-a-pound of rice some days and not on others, he did not mean that his average consumption was five and three-twentieth ounces per diem. So he gave up all thought of escaping and, saying as little as possible, led the way to the bungalow.

He hoped that, once inside, a certain air of unwelcome which he felt confident of being able to lend to the place would cause the visit to be a short one. To help this plan he became afflicted as they walked on with a gruffness which grew at last so alarming that the visitor stopped at the garden gate, produced a small box of cough lozenges, and invited him to suck one. Refusing the offer, the indignant Alexis led the way in.

"A nice little place," remarked the professor,

looking round the small apartment with interest.
“So—er—compact.”

He took the chair offered him and, leaning back, knocked his head smartly against the bed-post.

“Ay, it’s compact enough,” admitted McQuat grudgingly. With a foot that insisted on being conspicuous he pushed the kettle a little farther under the bed and, breathing hard, took the chair opposite.

“I used to have a place like this myself when I was a student,” went on Haliburton J. pleasantly. “The only thing is that one’s possessions do accumulate so. But my motto was, as I dare say yours is, Mr. McQuat, ‘A place for everything and everything in its place.’”

“It is,” assented Alexis gruffly.

A noise like a faint miaow from the cupboard seemed to vouch for the truth of this statement. McQuat started in his chair and then sank back with a well-marked air of unconsciousness.

“What was that noise?” asked the professor sharply.

“Noise?” echoed McQuat. “Oh, mebbe the hens outside.”

"It sounded more like a cat. Ah, there it is again."

The beach-comber, putting his hand to his ear, was rewarded by a faint miaow.

"What is it? A cat in the cupboard?"

"Oh, that," explained the beach-comber, twiddling his fingers nervously in an endeavour to gain time. "Och, a cat? No. That's a young leopard I've got. I'm trying to tame it."

"Well, it would get tame in that cupboard," assented the professor drily.

"Ay, that's the way we tame they leopards," agreed the beach-comber.

"I shouldn't like to have a young leopard in my bedroom though," remarked the professor. "A young leopard," he added, looking at the cupboard curiously. "I've never seen one."

"Have to keep it in darkness, it being a nicht animal," stated McQuat, rejecting the hint hastily. "I tried letting it out in daylight onst and it gave my thumb a gae cruel biting."

He produced the thumb for the professor's inspection, and then, observing its dirty condition, thrust it hastily back into his pocket.

"Strange how like the voice of this young

leopard is to a cat's miaow," went on the visitor, with annoying pertinacity. "But I suppose I am myself a little to blame for that. All sounds seem like a cat miaowing to me since that cat was stolen. Odd, isn't it, Mr. McQuat?"

Judging from the expression on the beach-comber's face it was the oddest thing he had ever heard of.

"Och, the one that was stolen?" he remarked feebly.

"We're searching for it all over the place," went on Haliburton J. "We're bound to get it soon, and I pity the thief when he's caught. Hallo! There's your leopard again. I should like to look at it."

"It couldna be risked, sir," explained McQuat, trembling with anxiety. "The sunlight seems to turn it into a devil."

"If I were you I should keep it quiet when the police come to search your bungalow," advised the professor. "It sounds like a cat."

"Search my bungalow!" gasped the beach-comber.

"We may have to search every bungalow," explained the professor, allowing for the first time

a suspicious glance to fall in the direction of his host. "The police might visit you at any time."

"They'll find nothing here," exclaimed McQuat. "Mr. Kamp can come himself if he likes. It beats me," he continued, with an air of innocence that seemed to himself lifelike, "how ony one could ha' the nerve to gae to the Postmaster-General's and steal his cat, a cat that nae doubt he has had by him for years and years and was sae fond of. I know what it is, sir, to love a pet." He shook his head sorrowfully.

"Steal the Postmaster-General's cat?" asked Haliburton J., in great surprise. "I didn't know it had been stolen."

The beach-comber looked at him cunningly. This was evidently some trap.

"I never knowed it had been stolen either," he said with a wary look, "until you tellt me."

"But I never did."

The beach-comber forced himself to smile unbelievably and to shake his head.

"The cat I'm referring to," explained the professor, "was one that was stolen from the mail steamer in broad daylight. Have you heard anything about that?"

He watched his host narrowly and, with some disappointment, noted that he denied all knowledge of the robbery in a tone of voice and with an expression of countenance which told of nothing but innocence.

There was little doubt. The man knew nothing. The professor hastened to apologize for hastily formed suspicions which had proved groundless.

"But, as I said," he ended, "I've got 'cat' on the brain. Do you know, at one moment I was actually convinced that my male tortoise-shell was in that cupboard?"

The fervour with which the odd-job man expressed his indignation at such a possibility was rather overdone, but the professor did not seem to notice it.

On his side, Alexis observed that his visitor had made no inquiries about the debt he had been invited to collect. That was good. On the other hand, he showed no signs of going, and his eyes were busy taking in every feature of the little room. Not at all a desirable visitor. Alexis decided to give him a hint to go.

"Let's have a doch and doris, as we say in

Scotland," said he, producing the bottle and trying hard to appear cordial.

"I never drink champagne in the afternoon, as a rule," said the professor. He, however, suffered his glass to be filled.

"Nor do I neither," confessed Alexis, lightly. "But I've had this bottle going on for a—a week now, and we'd best finish it. Here's luck tae ye."

He drained his glass with practised ease, and, his courage fast coming back, sat waiting for his guest to do likewise.

But the American, sipping the contents of his glass, continued to sit.

"Have you been long in the island?" he asked.

McQuat replied with gruff brevity.

"Twenty years!" muttered Haliburton J. "And you are a Scotsman?"

"Ay, am I," assented McQuat, yawning elaborately. It seemed that he was destined to sit there all afternoon.

"Then if that is so," pursued the professor, "you must have known my Uncle Campbell."

The beach-comber, with a look of great

astonishment, jumped a foot from his chair; then making an effort he succeeded in limiting the play of emotions beyond his entire control to his face only.

"I've never met a man of the name," he muttered. "Never in Jallagar."

"He's not telling the truth," reflected Haliburton J., looking at him more suspiciously than ever. "He's a bad hat, this man is. He knows more than he admits about that cat, and he knows a lot about my uncle. I shouldn't be surprised, judging from his face, to hear he had murdered him. I shall have to be cautious."

"You do not know or have not known anyone of the name of Campbell?" he inquired in his best legal manner.

"I do not," asseverated the beach-comber in an irritated voice.

"Don't you believe him, sir," said a voice coming from nowhere.

Both men jumped up in surprise. The beach-comber was the first to recover himself.

"It's only an auld parrot next door," he explained anxiously. "I'll wring its neck when I get a chance at it."

"Parrot yourself! I'd rather be a parrot than a public-house vocalist anyway," commented the unknown in a voice full of indignation.

"It isn't a parrot," said the professor with decision. "You've far too many animals about here, anyhow," he went on in a stern voice. "Even if your leopard is a leopard you've no business to keep it in that cupboard without taking out a dog licence. It's a question that will have to be seen into. Not that I want to act the spy in any man's house. But there are limits. Now tell me at once, please, what you know of the late Mr. Campbell."

"Never haired any one mention the name." asseverated the beach-comber obstinately.

He seemed determined to say nothing. It remained to be seen what threats would do.

"Are you sure?" asked the professor sternly. "Think again. Think while there's time. I'm convinced myself there's been foul play somewhere. That person next door as good as says you know about it. If the police find that you've been connected with his disappearance it may go hard with you."

"There hasna been ony person going by the

name of Campbell on this island," began McQuat in a queer voice, "but——"

"He knows all about Campbell," came from the other side of the partition.

"A strangely intelligent bird, that," commented the professor sarcastically. "Really I shall have to put the matter in the hands of the police."

"He knows all about Campbell," continued the voice. "Ask for that letter in his top jacket-pocket from his mother, Janet Campbell."

"What!" ejaculated the professor in intense surprise. "His mother!"

"And if he won't give it you, read this one from the same party."

With a tearing noise the reed wall close to the professor was burst asunder. A lemon-coloured hand at the end of a plump bare arm came through the orifice and thrust a well-thumbed piece of paper between the astonished professor's fingers. He glanced at it and at once recognized a handwriting that in his youth had been held up to him as a model. "My dear son," the letter began. There could be no doubt! This was the lost relative,—this!

"So you're my old uncle," he began feebly, holding out his hand. "Well, well, how time goes on! I'm glad to see you, glad to meet you so far away from the old country."

"Now then, McQuat, say, 'God bless you, my child,'" said the female voice from the other side of the partition.

"I'll do nothing of the sort," said the Scotsman. "Look ye here," he continued angrily, turning to his guest. "Maybe my name is Campbell. I'm no saying it isna. And maybe you're my nephew. But that's no my fault. It canna be helped. Dinna ye cast it up to me and I'll no cast it up to you."

"What do you mean?" asked Haliburton J.

"I say," returned McQuat, breathing hard and looking away. "I've got my own way of living. You let me alone. There's not a buddy in Jallagar that will like you the better for having me for an uncle. But one thing," he continued, after a moment's silence, "Gie me your word not to go writing o'er much to your auld fowk or talking in Jallagar aboot being ma nephew."

The professor promised with some alacrity that he would not.

"But we mustn't part like this," said he. "We must meet again."

"I dinna want to meet again," returned the beach-comber obstinately.

"Don't be a fool, McQuat," counselled the widow through the wall.

"You hear what she says," urged the professor. "Come, I may be able to do you a good turn. We mustn't lose sight of each other. You won't? Then shake hands, anyway."

A duet that had threatened to become pathetic was now interrupted by the arrival of Mrs. Vanderpump, who insisted on shaking hands all round vigorously.

Having done this, she announced that as, after all, long-lost nephews and uncles, she supposed, got hungry like other men, she would prepare tea and toast next door, and that if the professor and his uncle would do her the honour——

"I've only got one cup at the moment, sir," she went on, "but you can drink out of Mr. McQuat's and Mr. McQuat can drink out of a beer-mug, he's more used to it. I'll borrow your cup, McQuat, if you please."

Without waiting for permission, the bustling lady bent down and, before the unfortunate beach-comber had realized what she was doing, opened the cupboard door and put her hand inside.

She at once withdrew it with a terrified scream.

"There's something in there. It clawed me," she called out. "What is it?"

As if in answer to her inquiry there arose a violent commotion inside the cupboard, a half-carved turkey dropped with a thud on the floor, and there sprang out after it a yellowish object that streaked across the room, clambered, scratching, up the wall and out of the window.

"It is the cat—leopard!" shouted the beach-comber excitedly. "Stop it!"

They ran to the window and watched it tear down the strip of garden. Before disappearing over the fence it turned and surveyed them malignantly.

For an uncle and nephew newly met, the two were strangely silent at the widow's little tea-party.

It was a mental picture of the yellow-striped animal as it paused at the garden end that held them silent. They were both of them wondering if a young leopard looked like a tortoise-shell cat.

CHAPTER XVI

A SECOND search after tea of the garden and immediate neighbourhood having failed to reveal any trace of the runaway, the beach-comber bade adieu to his nephew with a mixture of feelings in which politeness fortunately predominated, and turned to the re-arrangement of plans now completely disorganized.

It was a work that required for its execution a deal of silent thinking about the future. Thinking aloud about the past and his misdeeds was of no assistance whatever, although Mrs. Vanderpump seemed to have an idea it was. After an effort to change her tune by an accusation that she did nothing else but harp, harp, harp, he repaired to his own quarters.

There, irritated and perspiring, he sat with closed eyes laying plans that seemed always too addled to hatch, and at last went early to sleep, thoroughly tired of staying awake.

About ten o'clock he was aroused by a rat-tat

on the front door of his bungalow. Putting on some clothes, he hastened to answer the summons. The tapper was a Malay lad in the red Government House uniform. He had no letter, but carried a message from the Resident that Mr. McQuat was to call at the Residency next evening bringing the cat with him.

"The Resident is now angry about we know not what," the servant added in answer to a question. "There will be much trouble for you if you fail to come."

"And do you know what I'm angry about?" asked McQuat of the dimly lighted doorpost, after staring stupidly in the direction of the retreating messenger. "Och, ye dinna! Well, tak' that!"

Giving rein to his desire to hit somebody or something, he gave the post a slap. It was a hard slap, but it failed to flatten a nail in the post that he had not before noticed; and he spent the next five minutes in taking part in a circus, the floor of his apartment doing duty for the ring, the mosquito curtains of his bed serving once as a hoop. Exactly what animal he represented was not clear. In his own mind he figured as a tiger, but Mrs. Vanderpump, if the fact that she rapped

on the wall twice and told him not to be an ass was any guide, had other views. When he sat down after a while, breathing hard, he began to think hers was the clearer vision.

The sudden demand of the Resident upon him necessitated another change of plan. The plan that once laid takes time to mature but performs this act without assistance was the sort of plan he liked. But in the present instance something very different was called for. How to catch a male tortoise-shell cat before next evening, that was the problem. After pondering on it whilst sitting and whilst pacing the floor, he at length lay down, his brow knit, in a final mighty effort after a solution.

An answer came in course of time, or rather the semblance of one. He lighted the hurricane lamp, fished out from a drawer a long piece of string, and tied one end of this string to the window shutter. Then selecting a shorter piece of string, he slung it over a whitewashed roof beam near the window. Next he walked slowly and deliberately over to the cupboard. He listened. The house was silent. A faint snoring from the adjoining apartment indicated that one

spy at least was laid low. With a smile of satisfaction he bent down, and feeling in the cupboard brought out the unfinished turkey, tied it to the shorter string, and hoisted it level with the window-sill. Then extinguishing the lamp and thrusting the window-shutter outwards, he picked up the end of the long string and, crouching in a corner, waited.

It was a hot, dark night, and what stars there were shone tremulously through the light veil of cloud that filled the upper air. That there were cats about he was certain. His back-yard he had never known empty of them after sunset. If the number of fights that took place there was any guide, it seemed to have been long ago selected, regardless of his convenience, as the cat duelling-ground for all Jallagar.

But on this particular evening the neighbourhood was free of caterwauling. From the look of things one might have thought that some spiteful person had issued a warning to all cats concerning him. He felt it was better thus. The truant tortoise-shell would feel more inclined to venture back in search of food if undisturbed by strangers.

He wondered if the animal knew that food was hanging there for it. He himself did, the turkey having been dead long enough to make its presence noticeable. Cats, he recollected, had at best a poor sense of smell; but even a noseless cat ought to have been able to smell that turkey. Directly he had opened the window a horde of mosquitoes in wait outside had streamed in and pounced on it like one man. They were still coming in. In fact, they seemed likely to be the only visitors that night. What felt to him like an hour had now passed. His hand was cramped from holding the string, his chest, having performed a like office for his breath, was in a similar condition.

At last he arose, his rusty legs aching under him, and was about to light the lamp and hang it beside the bait in a last attempt at success, when suddenly, coming from close to the window, he heard the loud miaow of a cat. He crouched hurriedly. There was another hungry miaow, a scuffle, and a huge cat jumped on to the window-sill. As it stood there silhouetted against the pale darkness, the highly excited beach-comber had no difficulty in recognizing the tortoise-shell.

With a snarl it sprang at the turkey. A dull crash followed as bird and beast fell to the floor together.

The exultant McQuat pulled-to the window and made a pounce at a dim object on the floor, an object which proved on examination to be the turkey. He was about to fling it away in disgust, when the trapped pussy, which had been lurking under the bed and was probably indignant at what seemed to be an attempt to rob it of its prey, sprang at him and clawed his nose severely. This duty performed, it tried to retreat; but McQuat gripped it hard and, despite a struggle, bore it to the cupboard and hastily slammed and locked the door upon it.

He then in triumph drained the bottle of champagne to the dregs, afterwards carefully draining the dregs also. Five minutes later he was in bed, wooing a slumber which he felt he had earned but which apparently was not to be bought.

It was scarcely more than dawn when he sprang up and went to examine his prize. No sound came from the cupboard, but when he removed the key and put his ear to the hole he

heard the hiss of breathing distinctly. From its regularity he judged the animal to be asleep—a judgment which he found, on cautiously inserting a hand through the door, to be hideously wrong.

Another attempt met with no more success.

On the third he managed to catch a leg with a whirlwind at the end of it, and dragged his prey into the light.

The next moment and he had thrust it back, banged the cupboard door, and, regardless of the ears of the neighbours, was getting rid of a multitude of adjectives accumulated during an intensely irritating night.

By some amazing miracle, that seemed to have worked backwards, the tortoise-shell had turned while he slept into a large sandy and red tom-cat which for two years, at any rate, had been the terror of the neighbourhood.

“Now then ! Now then !” cried the widow sharply, rapping hard on the wall. “When you’ve done ! What are you doing now—playing at being an earthquake ?”

“I’ve got something here what’s annoying me,” explained Alexis shortly.

“I thought from the sound that the monsoon

had burst in your bedroom," jeered the widow. "Don't get angry on an empty stomach," she continued cheerfully. "If you feel that you must bite something come and bite breakfast. I'm getting it ready now. There's eggs, toasted rice-cakes, and a cup of coffee waiting; and if you come quick I'll open a new tin of condensed milk. What? Aren't you speaking this morning? Come along now, there's a good boy; what's the good of being sulky over nothing? I'm good friends."

"But I'm not," snapped the beach-comber.

"Oh yes, you are," chirped Mrs. Vanderpump. "You only feel sad because you've been bad, as I used to tell the late Mr. Vanderpump nearly every morning. If you feel sad you may come to your breakfast with your black tie on; and, if that's not enough for you, give me an hour to boil a pail of water and I'll dye you black all over."

"Oh, ye'd dye me, would ye?"

"Yes, I would."

"What would ye dye me with?" asked the beach-comber, suddenly struck with an idea. His voice sounded gruff. But the change in

his expression was astonishing. In spite of the frightful adventures of the night, his face now was that of a man unexpectedly dowered with happiness.

"No nonsense, you great booby," called out the widow. "Are you coming?"

"Ay, I'll be there," cried he, still preserving with a struggle his surly tone.

Events that happened about him throughout the morning are best shown cinematographically :

First scene. Beach-comber to be seen engaged on the remarkable occupation of washing before breakfast. Glimpses of beach-comber dressing ; hatless, entering widow's bungalow ; seated in back parlour, sunlight shining in, looking very hot, fanning, talking, widow voluble, beach-comber listens with a cunning smile. After a while gets up, goes out. Widow looks after him, and then with demure smile gazes on ground.

Second scene. An empty beach, a low tide, narrow sandy shore, deserted but for innumerable hermit-crabs. Other small crabs run about at enormous speed. At the back coco-nut palms

planted thick, their grey weathered trunks standing, all with the same slant landwards, their roots showing. Above, an impenetrable wall of olive green, backed and topped by a hot, quivering blue sky. Farther on, the sand gives way to black-grey mud in which other and larger crabs have built cone-shaped castles, the size of mole-hills. Between these nests, spikes of young mangrove plants project from the mud like porcupine quills. The coco-nut palms now give place to dwarf mangroves, oddly twisted trunks growing out of many-pronged external roots, fruit like gherkins, leaves of emerald green among the branches. Beach-comber appears with axe, and stripping bark from the mangrove trees, ties it in bundle and walks away. The vibrant white light and the strongly defined shadows give an impression of unbearable heat.

Third scene. The main street of Jallagar, similar white light and black shadow. A Chinese shop, so full of goods that a customer can hardly move, with Chinese shopmen bare to the buff sitting cross-legged beside counter and doing sums on the abacus. Beach-comber enters and purchases some chemical that is carefully weighed

238 WANTED A TORTOISE-SHELL

out. No money passes, the beach-comber's credit being apparently good.

Fourth scene. Through the glaring sun, beach-comber toils home with purchases. He enters small bungalow. The door shuts.

CHAPTER XVII

IT was high noon when McQuat returned to the bungalow, high noon of one of the hottest days within his remembrance, a black noon when the earth was parched, when trees and bushes were shadowless, when the room was hot and he was hotter, and every bottle in the house was empty.

He poured a little water from an earthenware chatty and sipped it gingerly, determined that although such a drink might degrade him it should not dilute him.

Then, recognizing that the job before him was a long one and no time was to be wasted, he picked up the bundle of mangrove bark and disappeared through the back door.

The art of dyeing the domestic cat, although well known to the ancients, is new to Malaya. To the beach-comber, indeed, dyeing of any sort was in the nature of an experiment. But all life

is more or less an experiment, and he did not fear to face the difficulty. Whistling through his teeth, he bent down and chopped the mangrove bark into small pieces. It was a laborious business, rendered peculiarly irritating by the fact that the kitchen chopper, true to its race, spent most of the time in losing its head. By the time his task was completed, he seemed to have passed hours in bending and unbending, and realized how tired a caterpillar must feel about its waist.

The chips had next to be collected, placed in his largest saucepan and boiled with water for twenty minutes. The chemical—some compound of iron—in a smaller saucepan had, according to the instructions received at breakfast, to be brought to a boil at the same time. In the accomplishment of this seemingly easy operation the anxious Alexis, now thoroughly on his mettle, produced a blaze on the raised clay hearth of the little reed-built cookhouse so mighty as to threaten to fire the roof. He spent ten minutes, stick in hand, standing on the hearth and putting out sparks ; and only descended when, owing to the intense heat, he found himself in danger of coming

to the boil before the contents of the sauce-pans.

Luck favoured him ; the fire died down and became a mass of glowing charcoal. By dint of careful stirring he brought both pots to the boil together and carried them off to the bathroom, a small windowless lean-to next door to the kitchen.

It was when he came out again, having arranged the operating theatre to his satisfaction, that Mrs. Vanderpump—who had marked the fierce smoke of the kitchen fire from some distance off and hurried home—caught a glimpse of his busy figure. Looking through a crack, she was astonished to see him, very red in the face, emerging again through his back door and holding tight to a fiercely resisting sandy-red cat. He entered the bathroom and shut himself in. Listening intently, she heard a sound of scuffling succeeded by a series of faint miaows.

“It’ll soon be over, and a good riddance,” she soliloquized. “He’s caught that great tom-cat and he’s drowning it. My, he’s getting full of beans nowadays, isn’t he?”

She continued to listen. It seemed to require

a deal of drowning, did that animal; but she remembered its fine physique and allowed the beach-comber plenty of time.

But the miaowing after a time became so much more insistent that she had to give up her theory of murder being done and search for another explanation.

An idea that he was washing the cat was dismissed as improbable. Teasing it equally so, for she had never seen the beach-comber unkind to dumb animals.

The problem was difficult, and, as five feet of garden separated her eye from the nearest crack in the bathroom wall, she would have let it remain unsolved had she been anxious merely to satisfy her curiosity.

But on a particularly loud miaow succeeded by growls coming from the secret chamber, feelings of humanity, which even chicken-killing never atrophies, clamoured insistently. She brought a pair of steps and, scaling the garden fence, applied her eye to a crack in the bathroom wall, a crack she had noted before and had often longed to use.

The beach-comber had just managed to get

the cat tied by its four legs to a stout stick, and was now proceeding to pour cooling water into the two steaming saucepans. A peculiar sweet odour that accompanied the escaping vapour she recognized as that given off by the extract of mangrove.

She at once realized that Alexis was putting into practice knowledge cunningly gained from her that morning. Highly interested, she pressed closer to the wall in an endeavour to attain a wider field of vision, and succeeded in catching a glimpse of a coat and shirt hanging from a nail.

Alexis in a ragged bath-towel only, and with trickles of perspiration running over his absorbed face, had now come to the conclusion that the contents of saucepan one were cold enough, and, squatting on the ground, dipped in a forefinger carelessly. He withdrew it at once with a suppressed yell, and in an excited search after coolness thrust it into the other saucepan.

The surprise he exhibited when the finger came out a dirty black nearly made the widow burst out laughing, but with a struggle she managed to confine herself to a smile, and watched with intense amusement the annoyed

experimenter pop the finger into his mouth and solemnly suck it for some thirty seconds.

To his obvious disgust it came out looking if anything blacker than ever. After gazing at it consideringly for some time, he dropped it with the air of a man who has done his best and, seizing the cat, thrust its tail into one saucepan, whipped it out, and dipped it into the other. This treatment turned an animal now apparently resigned to its fate into an incarnate fury. Realizing probably that whilst it had nine lives it only had one tail, it made a terrible effort, bent like a contortionist, burst a series of knots, and twine that looked strong enough to hold a tiger, and ran off, nearly upsetting the two saucepans.

The delighted widow had now the pleasure of witnessing a game of puss in the corner as played by a man and a real cat. The latter gave a performance of great brilliancy. The man supplied the dash, or what is usually represented by a dash in works of fiction. He looked a loser all over until the sandy and red made a false move and was nearly cornered. It was then, on seeing the animal make a spring and

catch the valiant McQuat by the bath-towel, that Mrs. Vanderpump withdrew.

Returned to her parlour, she brewed tea, and, sitting and sipping, exhausted herself in an attempt to put two and two together, an attempt which she renewed later when she espied the secretive Alexis walking triumphantly up and down in the hot, sunlit garden, leading a dejected, damp, and thoroughly cowed animal on a piece of string.

Try as she would, she could not understand the beach-comber's sudden passion for cats, dyed and otherwise ; and, as the comprehension of her neighbour's business was to her a mainspring of life, she could not resist trying the effect of a direct question or two.

With this object she hurried into her garden, but the accidental slamming of a door defeated her intention, and looking over the fence she had the mortification of seeing the modest beach-comber retiring with stealthy quickness into his own abode.

She strolled patiently up and down until a sudden issue of smoke from the cook-house warned her that there were other means of drying things than by the sun. Later, her curiosity still

unquenched, she saw the beach-comber leave the bungalow. She noted that his dress was neat, for him, and that he carried a bag. His direction was towards the town.

The luck that had brought Alexis through an eventful day did not desert him now. His toilet had been hurried, and his mirror, none of the best, had not told him everything. He was unaware that his right eye had received its share of the dye until by mere chance an acquaintance met him and with rude laughter drew his attention to the fact.

It would have been fatal to have interviewed the Resident in such a condition, and he hurried into the shop of a friendly Chinaman, who, after an examination, rubbed the affected part with a coco-nut husk dipped in a solution of soap and lemon. It was a painful cure, but McQuat bore it with fortitude. Frequent stoppages to wipe away unbidden tears delayed his subsequent progress, and he arrived on the Residency lawn at the moment when the short tropical twilight was beginning to fade into night.

It was an excellent light to sell male tortoise-shell cats by, and he felt pardonably jubilant as

he walked up to the Resident on the lawn and, with an impressive air, turned his purchase out of the bag.

It was a cat, he felt, that did him credit, a cat worth five hundred dollars any day to a person who needed such an animal. He determined to ask six.

"What an extraordinary creature!" burst out the Resident, after a long stare.

"Not another like it in the wurrl, sir," returned McQuat, with an air of great satisfaction. "When I got it last nicht, I says to maself, 'If Mr. Vannery wants the real thing, well, here it is.'"

"Last night?" exclaimed Mr. Vannery. "It was two or three nights ago that you said you had it."

"I had it, sir, then," corrected the beach-comber hastily, "but I hadna properly got it. It was only last nicht that I got it properly."

"You mean 'bought it'; I see," said Mr. Vannery, with an understanding air. "Where did you get it? From a native?"

"It used to belong to a wumman living close to me," replied McQuat, truthfully. "But she didna want it."

"Not want it!" echoed the Resident, contemptuously. "Little she knows what she has missed. The markings are unusual," he went on in a loud voice, "but the shape of the animal and its royal carriage are those of the true tortoise-shell male. Pick him up and give him to me."

"He's very fierce, sir," pointed out the beach-comber, warningly.

"Pick him up, then, and hold him tight yourself," ordered the Resident. "Who's that by the steps?" he continued, raising his voice. "Oh, it's you, Melita. Come here. I've got the cat. He's a remarkable creature."

Melita walked quickly over the lawn and stood beside her father. McQuat loosed one hand and attempted to raise his topee and bow. The "remarkable creature" took advantage of a long-sought-for opportunity, and gave him a vicious pat on the right cheek.

"What a fine, lively animal!" remarked the Resident, approvingly. "He ought to stand the climate well."

"Too lively, I think," cried Miss Vannery. "Aren't the markings, also, a little lively for a tortoise-shell?"

“Not at all,” said Mr. Vannery, decidedly. “I’ve been looking closer,” he went on, “and I have come to a conclusion about the markings. They have a meaning, I’m convinced of it. Look, for instance, at the round black mark encircling the right eye. That would mean that once the sun was darkened but now it is illuminant. Why, you ask, is it illuminant? Simply because the ancient religion of Egypt is being introduced into the Malay Archipelago. Again — exhibit the animal’s right side, my man—you see there a large black patch which Nature might have dabbed on with a brush ; but notice its triangular shape, notice its resemblance to the sacred pyramids. On the other side—turn him again ; thank you—we have what the uninformed would say were tabby markings gone wrong, but which I, who know, recognize as perfectly legible Egyptian hieroglyphics and a colourable representation of the temple of Ptah.”

“And I suppose the black tail means a melancholy story?” smiled Melita in a nervous effort after lightness.

“How often have I asked you not to laugh at these solemn things?” said the Resident,

passionately. "Now and here I forbid you once and for all to do so."

Miss Vannery turned very pale, seemed about to retort, but said nothing.

McQuat, indignant that so beautiful a creature should be abused, when asked what his price for the cat was, put it without hesitation at seven hundred dollars.

Melita left the two in heated argument, unable to agree. But a bargain was effected, for later she heard her father's shout of delight, and saw him rushing like a madman towards the house with the cat in his arms.

CHAPTER XVIII

THE Honourable the Postmaster-General of Jallagar and his household spent the remainder of the night of McQuat's visit in peaceful slumber.

The water-carrier, coming in to sweep the veranda in the morning, was the first to discover that a robbery had been committed. He hastily called the second boy, who, running in half-dressed, at once discovered that the turkey as well as the new cat had disappeared.

A message shouted in guttural monosyllables at the servants' quarters from the back door brought out the head boy, who, with all the calmness in emergency of his race, walked gingerly round his sleeping master and searched for traces of the robber.

Finding none, he with the others adjourned to the kitchen, and at a general meeting decided that the safest plan would be for all servants to

go to bed again and let the sleeper in the dining-room awaken and find out his loss for himself.

Indignant astonishment, when, on opening his eyes about seven o'clock, he found himself sitting at a table laid for dinner with a large dish before him on which reposed one small sausage, aroused Adolphus with the speed of an electric shock. He wasted some five seconds blinking at the lamp as it flickered and died in the sunlight, then rushed to the back entrance and began to shout.

“Boy ! Boy ! Boy !”

There was no answer. The closed door of the cook-house stared at him peacefully. In the tender sunlight sleepy fowls picked breakfast with a languid air. Some little birds twittered in a mango tree close by.

The restfulness of the simple scene seemed to intensify the fat Swede's irritation. He yelled for the boy again, but it appeared that an ordinary unqualified boy would not now satisfy his demands. It was necessary, one gathered, that the boy supplied him should be of a ruddy hue, clad preferably in dripping gore.

"Boy ! Boy ! Come here, you —— boy ! Boy !"

"All light, sir," answered a superlatively sleepy voice from the servants' bedroom.

"If you are not come here in two minutes I will wr-r-ing your neck," announced Adolphus majestically, going back to the veranda.

It was a threat which the second boy had often heard uttered before, a threat which he had been in the habit of countering by taking at least two minutes and a half in which to arrive. But before sixty seconds had elapsed a loud howl and a roar of rage caused him and all the other servants to slip on jackets, unroll pigtails, and hurry into the bungalow.

Gathered in a small body for defensive purposes, they watched with an air of great interest their master searching for the cat. Later, going to the rail, they were spectators of the continuation of the hunt in the garden. The search was unsuccessful, and Kamp, followed by the Malay gardener, returned to the house where he led the way to the dining-room, ordering them to come in after him.

"Vere is my cat ?" he demanded fiercely,

after they had ranged themselves close to the door.

Not a Chinaman among them knew. None were, it seemed, even aware that there ever was a cat. The second boy, on being pressed, admitted having seen something in a basket which might have been a cat, but said that he did not approach to look, being of tender years and afraid.

"You're a damn liar," shouted Adolphus, in a violent effort to frighten him. "You haf stole my cat. Vere is it? Don't shake your head at me and grin, or I vill break every bone you haf. And vere is my turkey?"

"Perhaps you, sir, have eaten it," suggested the boy, hopefully.

"Can I eat de bones?" roared the fat Swede.

"You can do anything, sir," chorused the servants as one man, flatteringly.

The cook then interposed. In a glib speech he, to Adolphus's great irritation, held the balance of justice between master and servant. It was a balance which as held by him tilted perceptibly in what seemed to Adolphus the wrong direction. But neither master nor servant was to be considered blameworthy, it seemed. In the cook's

opinion the fault lay with the cat, who plainly had got up during the night, as cats will, had stolen the turkey, and fled.

"How could it steal anything and run away ven it vas in de basket?" queried Adolphus, irately.

The reply of the cook that the animal must have been an extra strong one sounded particularly feeble, and Adolphus in a passion seized the sausage on the dish and threw it at him in a fury. The cook ducked and the missile caught the Malay gardener full in the face. With a cry of rage the man rubbed the fat from his eyes and, drawing his short pruning sabre from its rough wooden sheath, dashed at his defiler.

"Run, *Tuan*, it was a pork one," screamed the excited cook in Malay.

But Adolphus, conscious that he had greased the face of the strictest Mohammedan in Jallagar, had already taken that precautionary measure.

The servants, flocking out of doors, had an interesting five minutes watching their fat master running round and round the garden, with the Malay in hot pursuit and steadily gaining ground. At length, when in a spasm of terror the fugitive

took a short cut, stumbled on a creeper, and fell heavily, they judged it time to interfere. Two of them rushed forward, tripped up the enraged Mohammedan and sat on him. The others assisted their limping master into the house and to bed.

A knee at first thought to be merely sprained, the doctor on arrival pronounced to be seriously dislocated, and ordered a thorough rest.

It was an accident inconvenient from more points than one. It enabled Kamp, however, to give, in a letter, a good excuse for not presenting himself at the Residency that evening. An offer, in reply, to receive the cat without his escort he ignored, causing in the meantime a strict search for the missing animal to be instituted throughout the island. He managed to conceal his loss for a time, and it was not until after a personal visit in which no glimpse of the cat was vouchsafed that Mr. Vannery became distrustful, and, without a word to Adolphus, closed with McQuat's offer of a male tortoise-shell.

The enraged gardener was carefully sat upon by the cook until cool, and then was allowed to rise. He demanded his wages, and left for town

to consult with the *imaum* about his defilement. In a lengthy conversation that venerable gentleman warned him that shedding the blood of even a Swede was a dangerous proceeding, and advised him to seek other methods of vengeance. Two simple methods of effecting this latter suggested themselves at once, and the angry Malay spent the nights following in damaging his enemy's garden, and the days in slandering his name, to the delight of the natives and Eurasians of Jallagar.

The dark-complexioned section of the inhabitants were not the only ones to rejoice in the fat Swede's accident. On most of the Europeans also it seemed to act as a sort of tonic. Miss Vannery, noting the marvellous improvement in her father's mind now that Kamp's influence was removed, spent half the days in smiles. The remainder of the time she devoted to entertaining a difficult-natured parent, with such success that he actually went to bed one evening without feeding his cats. True, he remembered the omission at midnight and roused the household. But she felt she had made a beginning and was delighted accordingly.

The coming of McQuat's unique specimen

disturbed a little the even course of the cure, and, casting about for a means of dispelling the abnormal interest her father was taking in his purchase, she at last decided to give a garden-party. At Mr. Vannery's suggestion she marked the invitations "In honour of His Highness." A sheaf of cards, posted by the Resident's enthusiastic hand, received instant replies. All were acceptances, and at least one society leader looked up the back files of her lady's newspaper to see whether ostrich-feathers in the hair were a necessity at such a function.

Some disappointment was expressed when the secret leaked out that "His Highness" was merely a cat, but it was evident that the day was to be a red-letter one, and most of the ladies seemed to have decided finally that, cat or no cat, it was their duty to do their share in colouring it.

As the youth remarked to the girl in blue, who was now in pink and wore a wedding-ring, the Residency lawn was ablaze that afternoon with every shade of the alphabet.

"I like you best," he continued, "in simple white."

"You won't when you get the laundry bills,"

she told him with a superior air. "Blues and pinks last ever so much longer."

"If they don't raise my screw soon," observed the youth, "we shall both have to wear sack-cloth and eat hashes. Let's go and talk to the Bobbys."

Mrs. Bobby, in a simple frock of emerald green, did not match the grass, and her husband, always a resourceful man, had on their arrival led her past the various shrubs that lined the lawn and seated her in front of the one which blended with her best.

Standing beside her, he watched the evolutions of a crowd that was the largest, gayest, and noisiest he had ever seen in Jallagar. There was no room for tennis on the lawn that day. Vividly clad ladies, and men in dazzling white, moving slowly about, gave in the hot, bright sunshine the effect of a kaleidoscope. The sky was a gorgeous unspotted blue. The carved white walls of the Residency shone like enamel. Patches of creeper and brilliant red trumpet-flowers formed a background for the Resident and his daughter, who stood near the porch shaking hands with the latest arrivals.

Mr. Bobby noted that Professor Bliss was standing with them, and that Melita, when she had time, talked to him vivaciously.

He was about to call his wife's attention to the pair when the youth and the girl in pink came up.

"Is this the grand stand?" asked the youth jovially, "or are you practising for police duty?"

The Superintendent of Public Works replied grimly that he preferred standing so long as he did not have to stand his questioner. He inquired how the girl in pink had done it for the past fortnight.

But the bride was too busy admiring Mrs. Bobby's new frock to notice the witticism, and, listening in his turn to her remarks, he was proud to discover that what he thought was a hideous green was the very shade that at that moment all London was wearing.

"Come and play croquet," suggested the youth. "It's at the other end of the lawn in the shade. It'll do us good."

"Yes, do, Mrs. Bobby," urged the girl. "I shall play with your husband. He plays magnificently."

Smiling, the Bobbys suffered themselves to be led across a blazing, crowded lawn where every one had a word for them. They had got through a game of croquet when tea came. The two men brought chairs, then cups and a tray with cakes and Pelung confectionery.

Mr. Bobby was silently sucking his fourth chocolate when he observed, coming along the drive within twenty yards of them, a highly-coloured figure wearing an exceedingly small straw hat. The figure stopped directly his eye caught it, and bending, looked along a massive walking-stick. Having taken a bearing, it got under way again and steered a bee-line for the lawn.

"Whoever is it?" asked Mrs. Bobby. "I've never seen a man walk so straight before."

"Perhaps he's a tightrope dancer practising," suggested the youth.

"He looks more like a man who's used to walking along chalk lines in police-stations," remarked Mr. Bobby. "Ah, I thought so."

The man had reached the edge of the lawn and with his eye fixed unwaveringly on his mark—a tree behind where the four sat—walked on,

his head held rigidly at a level which he appeared unwilling to alter. When he came to the grass bank, in order to preserve this level he made an obstinate attempt to walk on air, failed hopelessly, and fell full length on the lawn. He at once picked himself up, rescued his hat and stick, and, turning, gazed sternly and reproachfully at the grass bank.

Disgusted apparently at the sight of so much treachery, he turned round again, and, observing for the first time the Bobbys' party, lifted his small hat with a flourish and advanced towards them. He at once stumbled over a croquet hoop. He got up, and, with surprising alertness, picked up hat and stick once more. Before again setting out, he gravely replaced the hoop in the ground.

"Tae the de'il with all these public parks say I," he observed to Mr. Bobby on drawing near. "A gentleman canna gae walking on a bit o' grass without there's a whin hoops putt there to break his neck so as he willna gae on the grass ony moir."

"Yes, it's a dangerous place, this," agreed the youth.

"An' how's a' wi' ye the day?" inquired the stranger, balancing himself on his stick, and giving forth a smile of benevolence. "Not so weel as micht be, I ken that fra' the look on your faces. Lots of fowk here!" he went on solemnly. "Men, women and bairns, all enjoying theirsels this bricht summer's day. And Mr. McQuat's enjoying hisself wi' the best o' them. I'm Mr. McQuat."

"That's right," murmured Mr. Bobby with a smile at Mrs. Bobby, who did not respond.

"Yes, I'm 'joyin' a' richt," continued the man, gazing about him with an air of much interest. "Where's ma nephew?" he continued suddenly. "Where's ma young nephew?"

"Your nephew?" asked the youth. "I don't know. He's not here. Why not," he went on ingeniously, "search for him over there where all those people are? That's where you'll find him, perhaps."

The new arrival thanked him profusely, and staggered off in the direction indicated. Presently, when a laugh of mingled amusement and indignation came from the thronging guests, the Bobbys and their friends rose and followed him.

"I wonder if he's found his relation?" muttered Mr. Bobby to the girl in pink as they gently forced a passage through the crowd. "He has, by Jove, and it's the professor! Well, I always heard Bliss had a rich uncle!"

"Rich uncle!" whispered a pimply gentleman next to him. "Why, it's McQuat, the beach-comber. He must have struck it lucky. And, isn't he well-oiled! Not 'arf!"

The highly interested spectators closed in and listened to the affecting speech that the uncle was making.

"In Pelung ma name was Campbell," McQuat explained solemnly to the world in general. "An' this great big gawkie is my wee nevvv Haliburton. Many's the time I've dandled him on my knee or would ha' done if he hadna been in America and me in Pelung. But the wurld's a sma' place when it's a case of uncle and nevvv wanting to meet. We've managed it at last, an' —an', I'm never going to leave him any mair. In fac' I've adopted him. Canna ye see how pleased he is?"

The professor was, every one saw, trying his best to look so. The crowd withdrew, leaving

uncle and nephew to the solitude two newly-met relatives would naturally desire. Forming a wide circle, it turned and observed the pair closely. Comment was none too kind, the uncle's loud check suit especially coming in for adverse criticism.

"He seems to have studied the art of lecturing," observed the pimply gentleman to Mr. Bobby. "Bliss is getting it hot!"

McQuat stood for a minute or two longer in front of the professor addressing him and wagging a forefinger. Then, perceiving suddenly that the onlookers had left him, he instructed them to draw closer and keep off the draught. As they did not do so he seemed to have come to the conclusion that they were waiting to be entertained, for he at once took off his small straw hat and began his favourite song :

"I have heard the mavis singing
Its love-song to the morn."

It was a favourite song with some of the audience until McQuat sang it. But his rendering spoilt it for them for ever. He had reached the end of the first stanza and was apostrophizing

"Bonnie Mary of Argyle" at the top of his voice, when Melita came out of the Residency.

She went across to where the professor was seated. He rose and spoke to her earnestly. The spectators perceived from the glances the couple cast at him that they were talking of the songster. They thought they noticed that Miss Vannery looked at first incredulous, and then, as she came over and joined Mrs. Bobby, faintly scornful. They thought, also, that they could detect a tired, slightly hopeless expression on the face of the professor.

He sank back in his chair and waited for his uncle to stop singing. But that gentleman, having successfully concluded his favourite song was, by way of an encore, beginning it again.

It was at this moment that two persons arriving from different directions caused every one to forget for the moment both Bliss and the songster. First, the Resident was seen emerging from the Residency. He carried with the greatest care a large silk bag. Secondly, a ponderous figure, limping along with the aid of two sticks, came slowly up the drive.

"Why, it's Kamp!" said Mr. Bobby. "I thought he was safe in bed."

"I wonder how he knew about it?" murmured Melita to Mrs. Bobby. "I took especial care not to send him an invitation."

With a deepening interest and some sense of mystification the now silent crowd watched the two converge toward the centre of the lawn, where still the unconscious songster sang.

CHAPTER XIX

THE Resident was the first to arrive. He held up the bag, smiling with a politeness which must have cost him something, sat down, and waited for the end of a song which he obviously thought was being given by request. His daughter, with the Bobbys and their friends, joined him unobtrusively, and feebly followed when at the end of the song he led the clapping.

To sing before such an appreciative audience was a new experience for the humble beach-comber. He turned and bowed low, his small straw hat placed well over the heart and, determined that all should have their fill of the treat, began his song "Mary of Argyle" for the third time.

Mr. Vannery, obviously disconcerted, rose, looked about him undecidedly, and reluctantly sat down again. An anonymous request from the back of the crowd that the singer should be

turned out, he answered by a lifting of the hand. An impatient audience realized that civilization has not yet invented a social rule by the aid of which a thoroughly determined vocalist can be compelled to cease his lay.

Glasses of water held out the songster sniffed at and waved away. When the pimply gentleman threw him a dollar, he picked it up and, never for an instant ceasing to sing, bowed his thanks profusely. The disgusted giver was about to follow on with a heavy cushion when a roar at the extreme edge of the crowd announced the arrival of Adolphus.

The fat Swede pushed his way through the audience without ceremony and, limping heavily, made straight for the Resident.

"What is de game? Why haf I not been told?" he shouted in a voice audible all over the garden.

A shiver of excitement ran through the crowd. Here apparently was another person in a state of intoxication. They observed the Resident rise and open his mouth to speak. He was at once shouted down by the latest guest.

"Dere is a plot!" yelled Adolphus. "I

know all ! I haf heard ! Vere is my cat ? I vill not be robbed ! ”

“ Here, sit down, Kamp,” said Mr. Bobby, coming towards him. “ Don’t get excited.”

“ I vill not sit down,” declared the fat Swede furiously. “ You tink I will keep quiet and be sheated by you Englanders ? I vill have rights ! ”

“ Mr. Kamp, Mr. Kamp, you’re mistaken,” declared the Resident in a soothing voice.

“ You talk like zat to me, oily tongue ! ” yelled Adolphus. “ You have stolen my cat and now you broduce it when you tink I am ill and asleep. But I am not asleep ! I am very wide awake indeed ! ”

“ How dare you speak to me like that, sir ? ” said Mr. Vannery in a loud voice. “ Sit down at once or I will order the police to remove you.”

“ You order de police to remove me ? You ? ” screamed Adolphus.

The vocalist, still busy with his song, noticed for the first time that there was some disturbance going on behind him. He turned majestically and, fixing the fat Swede with his eye, advanced to enlist the attention of this new arrival.

"Though your voice may lose its sweetness,
And your eye its brightness too,"

he sang cheerfully, coming up close.

Adolphus, with a glare of disgust, turned on his heel and, hobbling a few paces towards Melita, raised his hat.

"Though your step may lose its fleetness,
And your hair its funny hue,"

yelled the beach-comber, pursuing him.

"What you say about my hair?" demanded the Swede, who was rather touchy about its carrotty colour.

The singer ignored the question, and went on to tell a now thoroughly convulsed audience about the state of feelings he had for his questioner:

"Still to me wilt thou be dearer
Than all the world can own.
I have loved thee for thy beauty,
But not for it alo—o—one."

At this point Mr. Bobby, fearing from the suffused purple of the fat Swede's face that he was about to have a fit, rushed forward, caught the vocalist by the arm and thrust him into a seat among an audience now almost ill with laughter.

A promise that he should be allowed to give another song later induced the indignant McQuat to a temporary silence. But it was plain that he felt badly treated in some way for, directly Adolphus spoke again, he was heard to murmur jealously to the person next to him that the man was singing flat.

"You ask me where I bought the cat?" said Mr. Vannery coldly to the Swede. "I am not obliged to comply with your demand for information, but I say that I got it from the gentleman who has just finished singing."

"A beach-comb! De lowest person in de island!" cried Adolphus.

"Not the lowest," shouted somebody. "British anyhow!"

"Hear, hear!" yelled the crowd.

Adolphus turned to answer them.

"You do not like me!" he hissed.

"We don't," shouted several young gentlemen heartily.

"But I vill show you vat your British justice is. Now I challenge de Resident—not when I am away as he hoped, but when I am bresent—to open his bag dere and show de cat."

"Let me do it," cried Mr. Bobby.

He looked inquiringly at Mr. Vannery and, receiving a nod of assent, picked up the bag and bore it silently to the centre of the arena.

Not a whisper from the audience! Those in the background drew closer. A dead silence reigned.

Mr. Bobby, after a short one-handed wrestle with a knot, knelt and tried both hands.

The girl in pink, having suggested in a whisper that the youth should lend the performer a knife, took her eyes from the bag and let them rest carelessly on the group near the Resident. She saw the calmness of Melita, the open mouth of Professor Bliss, the interested, merry expression of Mrs. Bobby. She noted with disgust the air of pleasurable anticipation that sat on Kamp's large, oily face. Suddenly, and to her great pleasure, this face underwent a rapid change, the eyes opened incredulously, the jaw dropped with a clang. She turned and saw Mr. Bobby about to lead the tortoise-shell cat up and down for inspection.

"Well, Mr. Kamp, do you recognize the cat?" asked Mr. Vannery, calmly.

"I do not," confessed Adolphus, staring hard at the animal.

Neither, for that matter, did Mr. McQuat. The one he remembered was smaller and damper looking. A few days' good feeding and careful brushing had given his capture an opulent appearance. It was sleek and plump and seemed very tame. Its coat shone. The dyed places had now deepened to a jetty black, and, so it appeared to him, positively sparkled. Blinking uncomfortably, he noticed the stained tail and the marks of his five fingers on the back. It suddenly occurred to him that other people might note this latter feature also. Glancing furtively down at his right hand he remarked with growing soberness its black appearance, and thrust it hastily into his pocket. Now in some anxiety he watched the Swede, and experienced a cold shiver every time a change of expression came over that gentleman's face.

Those marks on the back simply courted detection, it seemed to him.

"A lovely cat," remarked the professor to him. "Where did you pick it up?"

"I didna pick it up at all," he returned, on the defensive at once. "Them marks——"

"Oh, I thought you did," muttered the professor, with a stare. "Every one told me that you did."

"Then they said what wasna true," asseverated McQuat, doggedly. "I boucht it, that's what I did."

An explanation that this was what the professor meant reassured him. As the cat, slowly travelling round the ring, received nothing but commendation, his alarms after a while fled and he became lively again.

"I got the cat for a mere song," he announced to the general public in a loud voice.

"It's a wonder you got it alive, then," cried somebody opposite.

The beach-comber took the laugh that followed this remark as a compliment to his own sagacity, and proceeded to astonish the crowd with a description drawn on the spot of the exact method on which he went to work to secure his treasure. The seller, at first stated to be a Malay, became by a mere twist of the tongue a Chinaman when it was necessary for the cunning purchaser to put on a little pressure by pulling a pigtail. The actual purchase was a proceeding too involved for even

the purchaser to understand, so it seemed from the story. However, the cat was there, that was everything.

A cry from the Swede now diverted interest again to the animal.

The girl in pink, turning, saw that he had gone down on his knees and was examining its coat with the aid of a small magnifying glass.

"Ach!" he said, again lifting his head and staring slowly round him.

His face, now lit up brightly by the fading sun, had taken on again, she noticed, a look of some triumph.

"And vere," he asked, in an ominous voice, "is de shentleman who found de cat?"

"There he is," said one or two voices.

A hundred pairs of eyes became at once fixed on McQuat. He felt them and shivered.

"Will you step here, shentleman dat found de cat?" asked the fat Swede, with an appearance of terrible calm.

"What do ye want wi' me?" asked Alexis, in an uneasy voice, standing up.

"I want to see your hand," shouted Adolphus, rising also and shaking his fist. "I want to see

dat hand dat you have stuck like glue in your bocket. Dat hand is a black one, I am sure."

"It isna," shouted McQuat, with a feeble show of indignation.

"Dis is no tortoise-shell cat," went on Adolphus to the Resident in an insulting voice. "Dis is a plain sandy cat dat has been dyed. De microscope shows de crystals of de dye on de hairs of de fur."

"What?" cried Mr. Vannery, looking disturbed. "It can't be true. No, I don't believe it!"

"Dere was not much good of de old Egybtians braying to a cat like dis," said the fat Swede, with a meaning smile, gazing at him. "Yes, de cat is dyed, and dat hand stuck in de trousers bocket of de man over dere is de hand vat did de deed."

He stooped, picked up his two sticks, and limped over to where McQuat sat.

"Now, you beach-comber," he said threateningly, "take your hand at once out of your drousters bocket and let me see it."

"I willna."

"Why not?" cried several.

"Because I willna," replied Alexis doggedly, giving the only reason except one that he had at his disposal at the moment.

There was a murmur in the crowd. One or two dashed forward with the object, if their indignant demeanour was anything to go by, of making him do as the fat Swede wished.

To their astonishment these found themselves confronted with the determined form of Professor Bliss.

"My uncle is quite right," announced the new defender in a calm voice.

"Your uncle!" jeered Adolphus.

"Yes, my uncle," said the professor. "This is a British island, and I have carefully studied British law," he continued. "You cannot legally compel this man to take his hand out of his pocket if he does not wish to do so. After a summons has been issued and the court have decided that it is in the interest of justice that his hand shall be examined, then, and not till then, you may bring forward your police and have the hand extracted by force. Use power before that, and my uncle will instruct his solicitors to take proceedings for assault and battery. I am

now going," he added, "to take my uncle home."

"But den he vill vash his hand," pointed out the fat Swede angrily.

"Such is the British custom," said Hali-burton J., winking solemnly at Mr. Bobby. "Come, uncle."

It was a fine sight to see the nephew seize his new-found relation by the coat-sleeve and lead him gently away. The crowd, taking no notice of the fat Swede's petition that a policeman should guard the suspected man in order to prevent him from washing until his hand was examined in court, watched the pair steer a crooked course across the croquet lawn, mount the bank, and walk down the drive.

They then collected round the cat.

The persistent Adolphus had proposed to the Resident another test, and a servant was even now bringing across the lawn a bottle of vinegar.

"What you call vinegar, we call in Sweden acetic acid," explained Adolphus in an excited voice as he took the bottle. "It vill dissolve many dyes. I vill now," he continued, bending over, "pour ever such a leetle drop on de fur

and rub it with my handkerchief. If de handkerchief shows black, den de cat is dyed."

"Come closer," said Melita to her friends in a whisper. "We must look."

They drew up behind the cat.

"You vill observe," said Adolphus to the Resident, "I pour yust one leetle drop on to de black of de animal. Zo——"

He proceeded to tilt the bottle.

"Oh, I've dropped my handkerchief," cried Melita.

Stooping suddenly to pick it up, she collided with the fat Swede's arm; the bottle tilted violently and the cat received a good tablespoonful of vinegar on its eyes.

To decide who resented the deplorable accident most, Adolphus or its victim, was difficult. Both spoke at once, but the latter acted the quicker. Miaowing fiercely, it broke its string with a violent effort, and, dodging amongst the feet of the spectators, was across the lawn and half-way up a tree in a few seconds.

It was a pleasant sight to see the great Adolphus, with the vinegar-bottle concealed behind his back, stand in the sun at the foot of the tree

and try to coax the suspicious animal down. Some of the spectators, judging from the encouraging comments they made, would not have minded if he had spent the entire evening on the seemingly hopeless task.

But he gave it up after a few minutes, and returning, suggested that the beach-comber should be summoned that very day to appear before the court on the charge of swindling, and that a Sikh policeman should be placed under the tree to arrest the cat when it descended.

The Resident readily agreed to the latter suggestion but demurred about the former.

"I can't do that very well without better evidence," he answered.

"Besides," pointed out the smiling Melita, "probably Mr. McQuat has washed his hands by this time. So in any case you'd be rather late."

"Ah, you don't want him to be arrested," shouted Adolphus, turning on her. "You are on his side. You, ven sending out invitations to dis barty did not send one to me. You alzo hit me on de elbow yust now and make de vinegar pop out. Perhaps you alzo dyed de cat! You and your friend de American! Pah!"

"Professor Bliss is not——" began Melita, reddening.

"If you think you ought to have a summons, by all means have one," said the Resident angrily.

"Yes, have one," echoed Mr. Bobby. "Have one, Kamp. And if you can induce the Resident to grant one right away, why, there is no reason to prevent its being served this very night. For here's the process-server coming up the drive now. Just," he ended with a mischievous look at Melita, "in the nick of time."

"Zo he is," confirmed the fat Swede, peering down the drive, his hand over his eyes. "Der luck is goot. Ve vill haf de man yet. Mr. Vannery——?"

"Send for the summons-book, somebody," said the Resident coldly. "I will make a summons out."

He sat down and gazed before him into vacancy. His face had taken on again the despondent look which Melita thought the past few days had banished for ever.

"If it hadn't been for this dreadful Swedish creature," she said to Mrs. Bobby in an

exasperated whisper, "father would never have known the cat was dyed."

"He doesn't know it yet," said Mrs. Bobby. "There is no need to worry, Melita."

"It's most unfortunate the process-server coming here now," went on Miss Vannery. "He never does come to the Residency in the afternoon. What can he want? I've no idea."

"As a matter of fact," said Mr. Bobby in a low voice, "and strictly confidentially, the professor and I are to blame. We arranged it nearly an hour ago. I slipped over to the Residency myself and 'phoned them to send the man here at once."

"But what for?"

"Wait, and you'll see," replied Mr. Bobby, with an irritating air of secrecy. "But I don't mind telling you privately that I feel rather sorry for Adolphus."

Greatly encouraged by this last remark, Melita took a place near her father, and awaited the arrival of the most important official of the Jallagar service in a delightful state of curiosity.

As official executioner to the Government, the process-server was held in deep respect by

the natives. There had not been an execution on the island for eight years. But no one knew whose might be next, and it was the fashion in dealing with the person who would be in charge of it to err on the side of politeness and generosity. For seven years the present holder of the post had roamed about the island with the air of selecting a victim. Habit caused him to preserve this air even when serving a simple summons.

Now in the presence of so many Europeans he was stately in the superior degree. His salute to the Resident, when he had solemnly advanced to the centre and put his heels together, was the salute of one king to another. The Resident saluted back ; and it was at once apparent, to the process-server, which king had the better manners.

"What do you want ?" asked Mr. Vannery.

"I want Mr. Kamp, *Tuan* Resident," replied the process-server with military simplicity. "It is my duty to serve a summons on him for aiding and abetting the stealing of goods, chattels, and live stock from the *Sherrybung*."

"Vot is dis ? I am summoned ?" cried Adolphus, growing pale.

"*Ya, Tuan.*"

"But dis is scheating!"

"I never signed the summons," remarked Mr. Vannery, looking bewildered. "I am as surprised as you are, Mr. Kamp."

"No, sir, I signed it," said Mr. Bobby. "The case is quite clear," he went on sharply, addressing the fat Swede. "An Eurasian named Bunn came back to Jallagar with a valuable male tortoise-shell cat. You were in search of such an animal. A spy of yours—your chief clerk, to be precise——"

"He vas no spy of mine," burst out Adolphus angrily.

"Wait a minute," urged the Resident. "Let Mr. Bobby finish."

"He vas no spy of mine, I say," cried Adolphus again.

"This man reported to you——"

"He didn't."

"He says he did."

"He's a liar."

"Reported to you that there was a tortoise-shell cat on board."

"He did noding of de sort," yelled the Swede.

"Probably the same cat that's in the tree now."

"It was not," shrieked Adolphus furiously, determined to leave no statement uncontradicted.

"You will kindly note, Resident," proceeded Mr. Bobby in a calm voice, "that Mr. Kamp states that the cat stolen from the *Sherrybung* is not the one now in the tree."

"I said noding of de sort," roared the Swede.

"But you did, Mr. Kamp," said the Resident firmly. "I heard you."

"I did not! I am no liar!"

"I have taken a note of it," remarked the Resident in a severer tone than anyone had heard him use to the Swede before that day. "You will kindly remain silent while Mr. Bobby is speaking. Or, if you prefer it, we will postpone the discussion and I will deal with the matter officially in court to-morrow. You are quite sure of your ground, Mr. Bobby?"

"Absolutely," replied the Chief of Public Works. "I hold sworn statements from all witnesses. The case could not be clearer. If Mr. Kamp wishes," he went on, "I, too, shall be pleased to say what is to be said in court

to-morrow. I have no axe to grind. But—what do you wish, Mr. Kamp?”

The fat Swede glared, began to speak, then faltered.

“Say vat you vill. I vish to hear vat more lies you haf to speak,” he said at last sulkily.

“Very well,” agreed the Resident. “Go on, please, Mr. Bobby.”

“Having heard that this cat was on board, Mr. Kamp, in his house with, unknown to him, his Chinese cook and boy as well as his Malay gardener listening on the other side of the door, bribed the chief clerk to drug Bunn, steal the cat, and bring it to his residence.”

“Dat is not true,” cried Adolphus.

“This was done,” continued Mr. Bobby, taking no notice of the interruption.

“And I saw the cat there,” cried Mr. Vannery hastily.

“Exactly. Fortunately for justice and unfortunately for himself, Mr. Kamp held high festival that night. He drank too much and went to sleep at the dinner-table. While he slept some one came and stole the precious cat. He awoke, discovered the loss, and accusing the Chinese

servants of complicity, took a pork sausage from a dish and threw it at the cook. It missed the cook and hit the Malay gardener in the eye. The gardener in great indignation sought out the Eurasian, Bunn, who came to me, offered proof, and was granted the summons. And that," concluded Mr. Bobby, "is the complete story."

He sat down.

"And now may I shpeak?" cried the fat Swede.

Mr. Vannery nodded coldly.

"I say dis story is not true."

"If you don't admit the truth of it, you have your remedy," said the cool Mr. Bobby. "Why not serve a writ on me for libel?"

"I vill go to Pelung ven I can do it, and you vill see what I do," cried Adolphus, blustering.

"As you please," said Mr. Bobby.

There was a short silence. Adolphus looked about him malevolently.

"I vill stay in dis house no more," he screamed at last. "I am insulted! I vill pay all out!" He snatched up his two sticks and hobbled across the lawn. "Look out! Take care!" he yelled

in a last burst of rage on nearing the drive, turning his head as he limped along.

As if to emphasize the importance of following the advice he gave, he at once caught his foot in the last croquet hoop. He tumbled over, cursing loudly, picked himself up, and disappeared.

"And now that's over," cried Mr. Bobby, taking upon himself the charge of affairs for the moment, "I think we had all better go home. But before doing so, I propose—I know it's a bit unusual, but the events have been unusual—a hearty vote of thanks to Mr. Vannery for a most interesting afternoon. It's an afternoon which, I think, has done us all good, and if things go as they appear to be going" (A voice, "and people"), "and people, or rather one person, if you like, it's an afternoon well spent."

CHAPTER XX

PROFESSOR BLISS brought his uncle to a standstill for a moment in the drive, and turned to see whether his exit was still creating interest among those left behind. Perceiving that none, not even one, was paying the slightest attention to his doings, and that, indeed, the backs of all were towards him, he sighed gently, and set himself to the difficult task of steering a course in tow of a rudderless consort.

Fate, he felt, had used him hardly. Had it been kind, had the process-server arrived a little earlier, his uncle might have escaped a shaming, and he himself been a witness of the exposure of his enemy.

It is due to him to say that thoughts about the latter did not occupy him much, and that, indeed, he passed the process-server without noticing him. The fate of the gentleman on his arm was what chiefly concerned him, just as it was what chiefly concerned the gentleman himself.

McQuat's legs still had a strong tendency towards walking in zigzags, but his mind now showed no sign of wandering from the point. That he had never been in jail, but didn't mind if he was ; that they might give him six months, but that, whatever they said, he would refuse to labour hard ; these formed the chief topics of the first part of the journey. Later, as he became evaporated and less heady, his eagerness to defy the authorities dwindled, and he wondered if they would let him off with three months only.

"D'ye think they'll let me off wi' three?" he murmured in the professor's ear, sinking to the ground for the ninth time. "I could na thole mair."

"It'll be six or nothing," returned Haliburton J. irritably.

"Try and get 'em to make it naething," suggested the beach-comber, eagerly. "Ye see hoo it is wi' me. My legs are na what they were. They're no built for the treadmill onyway."

"I can't do anything, I'm afraid," muttered Haliburton J., in a weary voice.

"Ye can so," asseverated the beach-comber.

As if to emphasize the statement, he stopped

short, pulled his arm away from its supporting hand, tilted the small straw hat well over his eyes, and gazed at the professor from below it with great earnestness.

"Ye can that," he said again, laying a persuasive hand on the other's chest. "That is, if ye're not o'er prood to help your auld uncle. Nae doot, being an American professor, ye're naturally a wee bit puffed up. But I ask ye, laddie, if it 'ud be nice for you, when ye're swanking and swaggering about with the heid yuns of the country, for them to know that your auld uncle is doing time in the jail close by?"

"It would not," confessed Haliburton J. with feeling. "But, if I may speak plainly, you'd be better in jail than rolling drunk about the street. Here, stand up!"

"I'll no stand up any mair," declared Alexis, making a dash and clasping his nephew about the neck, "unless you promise to gae to the Resident richt noo, and ask him on your bended knee no to be ower hard on your poor auld uncle."

"Then you'll have to sit down, I'm afraid," said Haliburton J. shortly, trying to release himself. "I'll see what can be done, but I won't promise."

"It's no guid," muttered McQuat, holding on tight. "You maun promise."

This scene occurred in the very centre of the town. The sight drew a small crowd at once, a crowd that momentarily grew larger.

"Come along! Don't be foolish," urged Haliburton J.

"I'll no come along," said the beach-comber, obstinately. "Who are you tae tell a man who micht 'a been your feyther, and is forbye yun of your ain kin, tae come along?"

"Look here," said Haliburton J., in desperation, "I'll promise to intercede for you at once. We'll go into my office right away, and I'll ring up the Resident on the telephone. But I'll only do it if you'll sign a pledge promising him on your part that, so long as he does not prosecute you for cat dyeing, you'll never touch intoxicants again."

"Not to touch 'toxicants no mair?"

"Not another drop."

"I couldna promise that. Not another drop? Well, may I have a wee hauf a drop?"

"No."

"Not even as a medicine?" asked Alexis, still hanging on.

"Not even as a medicine."

"Ye mak' a hard bargain," said Alexis, releasing his grip and standing up. "But, you being my nephew, I'll oblige ye. I ha' no alternative. It'll be better than doing sax months on the treadmill, onyway."

"You promise, then?"

"I promise ye," said Alexis. "There's ma hand on it."

The natives, disappointed at the tame ending of what at one time looked like developing into a free fight, drifted away. Having got his uncle into the office and into the only arm-chair, the professor went to the telephone and rang up Mr. Vannery.

"Hello! Is that the Residency? Yes—can I speak to Mr. Vannery?"

"Who is it? Oh, you, Professor Bliss. Well?"

It was Melita speaking. Even through a mile or two of wire her voice sounded to him cold and disappointed.

"I wanted a word with Mr. Vannery."

"Is it urgent? He's not at all well."

"I'm so sorry."

"It's not your fault," she acknowledged coldly. "But—I'm afraid your uncle has a good deal to do with it."

"I have him with me now. I know he's sorry—I don't think he——" began the professor.

"The damage is done," said Melita, distantly. "Can I take any message for my father?"

"I was going to venture to intercede for my uncle," said the professor, in a hesitating voice. "He did wrong in dyeing the cat, but the money tempted him, and—I'm afraid he drinks a good deal. Do you think if he promised to start afresh and became teetotal the Resident could be induced not to prosecute?"

"I think I can say he won't prosecute."

"Oh, thank you."

"Not at all. You see—— Oh, perhaps you haven't heard! There's no evidence. The cat is dead."

"Dead!" exclaimed the surprised professor. "But," he went on, "the fur is there for testing."

"No, it is not," returned Melita. "The cat has gone for good. When the people left, my father ordered the Sikh policeman stationed at the bottom of the tree to climb it and bring the

cat down. The cat saw the man's turban slowly coming up the tree towards it, took fright, jumped off the tree and ran up another tree that hangs over the lake, and then out on to a thin, rotten branch. The branch snapped and the cat fell into the lake. Before it had swum a yard the large crocodile which my father brought from the Nile seized and swallowed it."

"Extraordinary!" exclaimed the professor.

"It is," agreed Melita, "and most upsetting to my father. Is there anything else?"

"Then, in the circumstances," said the professor, "there can be no objection to my promising my uncle that if he turns over a new leaf, as suggested, the Resident will not prosecute?"

"Not in the least," said Melita. She rang off.

She rang off, and the downcast professor, armed with an official piece of paper, went back to his relative.

An hour later he had deposited him at the bungalow and was walking home with the signed pledge in his pocket.

He had no great hope that the signing of this promise would have any great effect on his uncle,

but inquiries made during the next few days showed that, strangely enough, the pledge had not been openly broken at any rate.

The truth was that Mrs. Vanderpump, having had one sleepless night after McQuat had received payment for his cat, and determined not to have another, had entered the house next door when her neighbour was away and taken all the money she could lay hands on. A knowledge that the beach-comber had a hiding-place under a certain loose board in his parlour aided her considerably in this task.

She had robbed the place before, and handed the proceeds back to the rightful owner in small doles when he became fit to use money again. This time the sum she found surprised her. She returned to her own side of the bungalow carrying a handkerchief heavy with dollars.

On that evening, and again on the following morning, she waited patiently for Alexis to raise an outcry and come to her for something on account. But neither of the expected events happened. She heard the beach-comber whistling to himself lugubriously as he moved about his quarters, and applying her eye after a time to her

favourite peep-hole, was slightly astonished to see him "tidying up" with a thoroughness that was new.

A longing to applaud that awoke within her withered an hour or so afterwards when, on leaving a hen-house at the bottom of the garden, she had to duck out of the way of an empty beer-bottle thrown by an unseen hand. Another followed, and a hoarse, melancholy voice began to sing the well-known song, "Mary of Argyle."

Peeping over the wall, she caught the beach-comber in the act of hurling the third bottle.

"You seem to be busy," she said in her most sarcastic voice.

"I am," said Alexis simply. "A'm makkin' a guid job of it. I ha' done wi' all these vanities," he went on, indicating with his foot a row of empty bottles he had collected. "I'm biddin' 'em good-bye to-day, for now I'm a tee-totaller the very sight of 'em irritates me."

"Are you a teetotaller?"

"I hate the very smell of it," declared the beach-comber violently.

"That's funny."

"As for the taste!" continued the enthusiast.

"Awa', ye spawn of the de'il," he went on, flinging a third bottle over the wall in sudden fury. "Good-bye to ye, auld friend, I shall handle ye nae mair."

"Hush!" said the widow. "I've got a sitting hen. You'll frighten her."

"Is she in the end house?" asked McQuat, peeping over the wall.

"No, that's something—that's another pen," said the widow, slightly confused. "Yes, I'm trying meat," she continued, in answer to the question she thought she read in his eye, holding up her basket for inspection. "Meat makes hens lay, you know. Now, come along in and have a cup of tea, Mr. McQuat, and tell me what you've been up to lately."

But the beach-comber made an excuse about work to be done and would not be persuaded. Indeed, it was not until the next evening that she extracted over her ever-ready teapot his shame-faced version of the events of the past few days.

It was a story that made even her, ex-wife of a Pelung policeman, gasp.

"And your nephew has made you teetotal, has he? Well, he's a clever man," she commented

rather jealously. "I've been trying it, McQuat, for years now."

"Have ye?" exclaimed the beach-comber in surprise. "An' I never knowed it!"

"I don't suppose you did."

"What was ye wanting to make me a teetotal for?"

"I don't know. I just wanted to," said the widow, looking away and flushing slightly.

The beach-comber eyed her in amazement.

"Mrs. McQuat—Mrs. Vanderpump, I should say," he stuttered. "I—onyway," he continued with a cautious air, "I'm a teetotal signed and sealed noo, and, except maybe for a glass o' port wine onct in a wee while, I'll never touch another drop except at New Year time."

"If you touch anything at any time," declared the widow fiercely, "I'll give you away to the police, McQuat. I can't stand your spoiling of yourself any more. It's enough to break a woman's heart. Look you, senseless man, if it hadn't been for your nephew where would you be now? In jail with a lot of natives."

"Ay, an' I'll be there yet maybe," said Alexis ruminatively.

"Not if you're a man and keep your promise."

"I've no tell't ye everything," confessed the beach-comber hesitatingly. "Ye'd better have nae mair to do wi' me. What would you say if they wanted me for burglary as well?"

"For burglary?" cried the widow, horror-struck.

"Ay."

"Tell me about it at once," she ordered.

The beach-comber, after a loud preface in which he dealt with the evils of employing Swedes in the British colonies when decent citizens of the Empire were out of work, reduced his voice to a whisper—apparently with the idea of making it last—and did as the widow bade him.

It was a long story as he told it, the moral of it being apparently that the best-intentioned people, even when engaged in the innocent occupation of searching for work, are sometimes the victims of fate.

"And noo, Mrs. Vanderpump," he said when he had ended, striving hard to be impersonal, "if you was the buddy what stole the cat what would you dae?"

"What would I do?" cried the widow,

looking hard at him. "I would go and give myself up to the police at once."

"Would ye though?" exclaimed McQuat, wincing.

"Yes, I would. Best to get it over."

"It would brek my nevvys heart, the shame of it," pointed out McQuat unselfishly.

"I suppose you yourself wouldn't mind a jot?" said the widow with sarcasm.

"I dinna care for they polis," confessed the beach-comber.

"Well, then, if not to the police," continued Mrs. Vanderpump, pretending to consider, "I should go to the Resident or, better still, to his daughter, for I know her, and I should give her the cat and ask her to plead with the Resident and——"

"But how can I when I havena the cat?" exclaimed McQuat testily. "It was yon big cat," he went on, "that jumpit oot o' the cupboard and rin awa the day when ma nephew, the professor, came here firrst."

"Oh, that one?" murmured the widow softly.

"If that cat hadna gone awa, I shouldna needed to dye the other yun, ye see."

"I see," said the widow, nodding. "But of course, Mr. McQuat, I'm only *supposing* you had the cat."

"But I havena."

"We'll suppose you have it. Would you, if you had, be willing to take it to Miss Vannery and ask her to plead with her father to get you off being punished?"

"Would she get me off?" asked the beach-comber with a temporizing air.

"I'm certain she would," said Mrs. Vanderpump.

"Then I'd tak' the cat to her like a birrd," said the beach-comber. "I only wish I had it."

"How do you know you haven't?" questioned the widow, with a sudden smile.

"How do I—— I dinna onnerstan' ye," said the beach-comber.

"I say," asked the widow in low, distinct tones, "how do you know you, or me which is the same thing, hasn't got the cat in one of my hen-houses now?"

"What?" cried the astonished beach-comber, jumping up. "Mrs. Vanderpump, you——"

"How do you know," continued the lady,

with a pleased smile, "that, when you thought the cat bolted over the wall and was gone for ever, that it did not come back? How do you know that it did not come into my hen-house? Wouldn't it naturally like me better than you?"

"But if it had ye would have tellt me," objected the beach-comber, with an air of trying hard not to believe what he already knew was the truth.

"Told you! When you were sulking and grumping in there!" laughed the widow. "Told you! Was it likely? But you're a different man to-day, aren't you, McQuat? So if you wish, and as a great treat, you can come down to the end hen-house with me now, and see the cat that you lost."

CHAPTER XXI

IT was monsoon weather in Jallagar. A youthful sky laughed and wept by turns, and because of its April uncertainty the Residency at-home was held in the drawing-room.

When Melita had said good-bye to the last guest but one—a stout lady in brilliant orange silk—she came back and offered more tea to the last of all.

“No, thanks,” said Mrs. Bobby, “I must go too. Well then, just a little. Mrs. Gladstone Mortimer says she got her new red dress from Paris,” she went on, taking up the cup and settling herself for one last minute’s talk. “Thank you.”

“You seemed to be together more than usual,” remarked Melita.

“She was very amusing.”

“She can be sometimes. What was it about?”

“About you,” said Mrs. Bobby, gazing straight ahead of her with a mischievous expression on her kindly face.

"Me?"

"She doesn't think you're behaving at all well," explained Mrs. Bobby solemnly. "She says she thought you had a kinder heart."

"What have I done, then?" asked Melita, reddening slightly.

"She says," related Mrs. Bobby evenly, "that things were different when she was a young girl. Then women were very particular about whom they encouraged, but once they had shown favour to any one they would never have turned him away merely because he had a poor but honest uncle."

"A what?" cried the surprised Melita, blushing furiously.

"A poor but honest uncle," repeated Mrs. Bobby.

"She said that?"

"Those were her exact words," returned the faithful friend.

"It's kind of you to tell me," said Melita bitterly. "And that she should say such a thing after her treatment of Ethel Mortimer!"

"That happened a long time ago," pointed out Mrs. Bobby. "She's older and more tolerant now."

"Perhaps you sympathize with her views about me?" asked Melita, indignantly. "You do! Well, I didn't think you'd ever believe as badly as that of me."

"He never comes here now," pointed out Mrs. Bobby.

"Who is to blame for that? Every one in the Service can come to the Residency."

"He never goes anywhere."

"It's not my fault, I assure you," said Melita, with a smile.

"Well, good-bye," said the lady, rising.

The disapproving shake of the head she gave on departure would have irritated Job himself, but Miss Vannery smiled more pleasantly than ever. Coming back, she instructed the servant to clear away, and left the room.

When, after an interval of half an hour, she again appeared she was, if signs such as frequent surveys of herself in the glass and consultations of her wrist watch were to be relied on, expecting a visitor of some importance.

A firm step on the corridor announced an arrival. She rose, her cheeks flushing.

It was the professor.

"I got your letter——" he began.

"If you hadn't kept away," said Melita, "it would not have been necessary to send it. Why have you kept away since that afternoon?"

"I didn't intend to," he returned feebly. "After all, it's—it's—not so very long ago."

"And I wanted to hear so much how Mr. McQuat was," said Melita, smiling brightly.

"He's all right."

"Is he fond of you?" she asked with some abruptness.

"I think so," said Haliburton J., looking puzzled.

"And does he approve of me?" she inquired solemnly. "I only ask," she added, "because it's since you found him that you have neglected us all at the Residency so much."

"On the contrary——"

"It doesn't matter."

"But it does," contradicted the professor.

"Surely not?"

"If I had had that tortoise-shell cat," explained the professor, growing excited, "I shouldn't have minded my uncle. Not that I mind him now," he added, "but——"

"That's exactly why I wished to see you," interposed Melita. "It's a subject I'm still anxious about. Are you searching? Have you found the cat?"

"No—I——"

"It's the only thing I asked you to get for me," she said with emphasis.

"You know," returned Haliburton J. hotly, "I'd give everything I possess to find it."

"Everything?" asked Melita.

Something in her tone caused the dolorous professor to look up.

"Melita!" he said in surprise. "Melita!"

"Ah, if we only had the cat!" she murmured, drawing away.

"Melita!" cried the professor, following eagerly. "What does it matter about cats? What does it matter about uncles? Nothing matters, nothing. Only that I love you, that I want, I ask, you to be my wife."

"Oh, Haliburton J.," said Melita softly, evading him, "how often have I told you that I hate this native custom of asking for wages in advance?"

"I'll get a cat yet," cried the professor bravely.
"I will—— Melita, if I do?"

"Of course, if you do," she murmured.

"I'll search the whole of Asia!" said the professor in a determined voice. He picked up his topee. "I'll begin to-night!"

"But where are you going to begin?" asked Melita gently.

"With the island, of course," announced the professor.

"If—if you wouldn't mind beginning by looking in that hamper in the corner," murmured Melita, growing suddenly very pale.

"In the hamper?" asked the professor.

He gazed at her stupidly. But only for an instant. Then rushed to the corner and lifted the hamper's lid.

"Melita?" he cried rapturously.

"Yes, Haliburton J., whispered Melita with a burning blush. "Yes. It's your tortoise-shell cat—that I have brought to you."

POSTSCRIPT

MY DEAR DOROTHY,

I am sending you these last few chapters to glance through before they go to the printer. Thank you for letting me dedicate the book to you.

It seems ages since you last wore that pink dress on Jallagar lawn. I often wonder whether we shall run across many of our friends out there again.

Some we shall—— And here is a surprise for you. I had a letter from the professor this morning. They are in England, he and Melita, with Mr. Vannery and the baby—I didn't know there was one.

He wants us to lunch with Melita and himself in town on Thursday next. He leaves arrangements to me.

Now can your "Soldiers and Sailors' Families" spare you? I think I shall be able to get leave.

Munitions engineers are not quite so hard pressed nowadays. Let me know by return if you can come.

By the way, Bliss says that the McQuats—I mean Campbells—are going strong. The great man himself, it seems, has blossomed into quite a personage. Hands round the plate in church, serves on the Local Board, and so forth. Bliss says that Mrs. McQuat has other things to feed now besides chickens. I can't make out what he means.

Yours,

P. B.

WOOLWICH,

1917.

University of California
SOUTHERN REGIONAL LIBRARY FACILITY
Return this material to the library
from which it was borrowed.

LIBRARY

JUN 01 1989

UC SOUTHERN REGIONAL LIBRARY FACILITY



A 000 501 206 7

